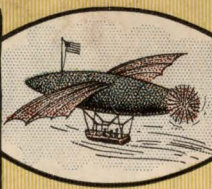


FRANK



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WEEKLY MAGAZINE.

Containing Stories of Adventures on Land, Sea & in the Air.

Issued Weekly—By Subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at the New York Post Office, 1902, by Frank Tousey.

No. 6.

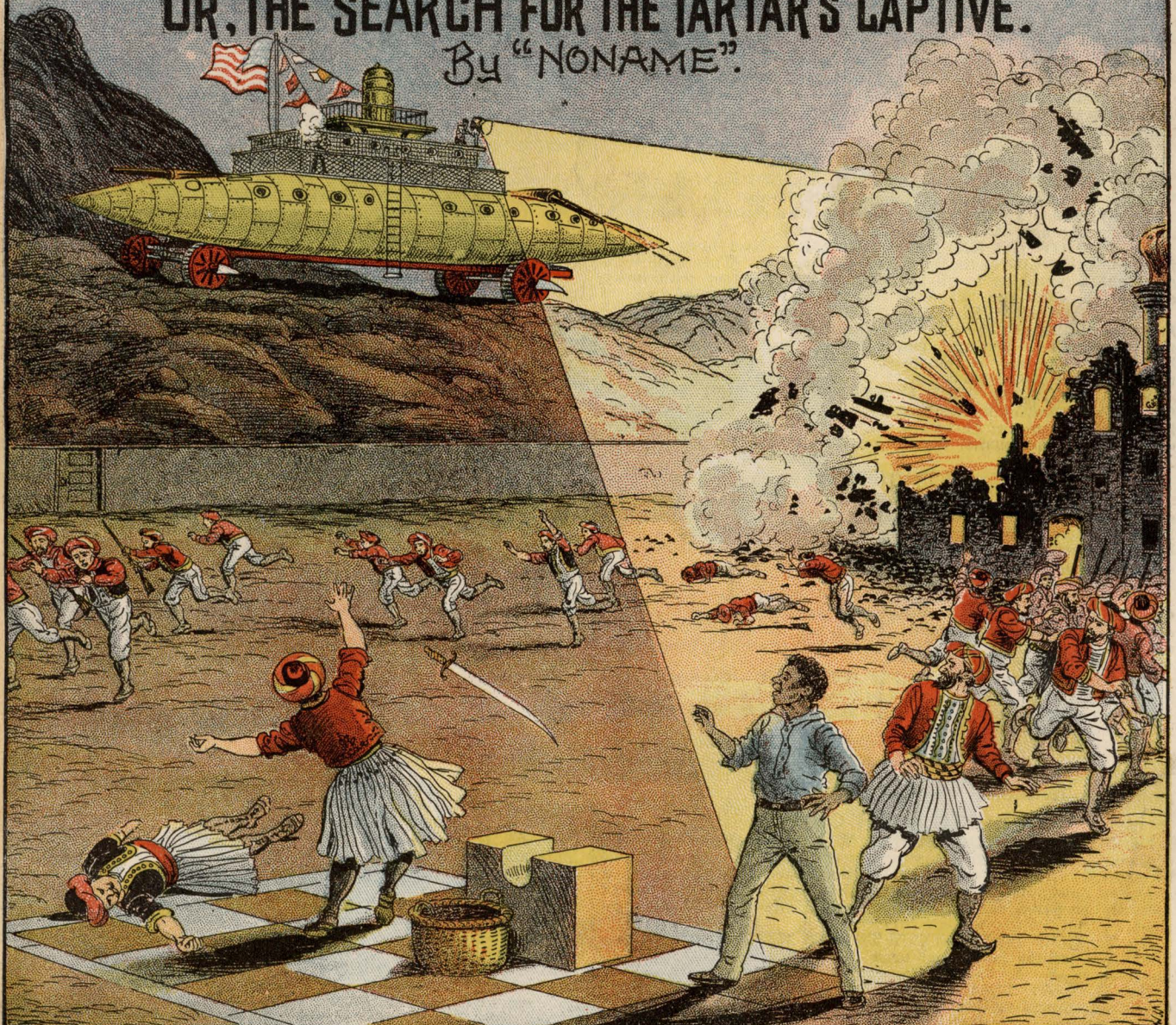
NEW YORK, DECEMBER 5, 1902.

Price 5 Cents.

FRANK READE, JR.'S ELECTRIC TERROR — THE "THUNDERER!" —

OR, THE SEARCH FOR THE TARTAR'S CAPTIVE.

By "NONAME".



Frank sent the blinding rays of the searchlight down and transfigured the whole scene. Crack! Mardo Turgi, with the order for Pomp's execution upon his lips, threw up his arms, and fell. It was just in the nick of time.

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NEW YORK, DECEMBER 5, 1902.

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Frank Reade, Jr.'s Electric Terror "The Thunderer"

OR,

THE SEARCH FOR THE TARTAR'S CAPTIVE.

By "NONAME."

CHAPTER I.

THE STORY OF NICK WARD.

One beautiful day in June a man alighted from a train in the Readestown depot, and jumping into a carriage, said to the driver:

"Drive me to the residence of Frank Reade, Jr., the inventor."

"All right, sir," said the cabby.

A short while later the carriage stopped at the door of a beautiful mansion, and the traveler dismissed the carriage, and mounting the steps pulled the door bell.

In response a darky of most comical and good-natured appearance came to the door.

"Is Mr. Frank Reade, Jr., at home?" asked the caller. The darky ducked his head.

"He am, sah. What wo'd kin I take to him, sah?"

"You are Pomp, are you?"

The darky gave a start of surprise.

"Dat am who I am, sah," he replied.

"I thought so," said the visitor, with a smile. "I have heard much of you, and Barney and Mr. Frank Reade, Jr., the inventor. Please take him my card."

"A'right, sah!"

Pomp disappeared with the card.

He carried it into an inner room, where a young man of frank, handsome features and a distinguished air was engaged in studying up some charts.

"Marse Frank, dar am a ge'mmen to see yo'," said Pomp, with a bow.

The young inventor, for such he was, and whose name was known the world over, sprang up.

"All right," he said, brusquely. "Who is he?"

"Here am his card, sah."

"I am very busy to-day, but——"

Frank took the card and glanced at it. He gave a start.

NICHOLAS WARD.

This was the name upon the card. It was evidently familiar to the young inventor, for he cried:

"Nick Ward! Well, well! I am indeed pleased. An old college chum and dear friend of mine. By all means show him in, Pomp!"

"A'right, sah."

A few moments later the visitor was in the library and shaking hands warmly with the young inventor.

Nicholas Ward was in built very much like Frank Reade,

Jr. He was a trifle older, but handsome and straight as an arrow.

"Well, Nick, old boy, how are you?" cried Frank, cordially.

"Very well, indeed, thank you," replied the visitor. "And you?"

"Quite well, thank you," replied Frank. "I am delighted to see you."

"I may say the same. It has been five years since we last met."

"Yes; and you have been traveling in Asia, I hear?"

"In Tartary, Indo-China and Hindostan. I have seen much of life in the last five years. And you have been to almost every corner of the world with your wonderful inventions."

"I have traveled some and experienced a few adventures," said Frank, modestly.

"It is no exaggeration," said Nick Ward, enthusiastically, "when I say that you are the most famous man in the world to-day."

"Ah, you enlarge upon that," said Frank, with a smile.

"Not a bit."

"Well, Nick, what are you up to now, may I ask?"

"I have come here to see you upon a very important question."

"Ah!"

"I do not know whether I can enlist your sympathy in my cause or not. But it is a just and charitable one, and I think when I have told you the story you will agree with me fully that something ought to be done."

"I do not understand you," said Frank, in a puzzled way. "You wish my help?"

"Exactly."

"In what way?"

"First let me tell you my story."

"Very well."

Nick Ward lit a cigar and tilted back in his chair.

"Just twelve months ago," he began, "I was in Constantinople. It was my purpose to push from there across the Black Sea to Pati, and thence by rail to Tiflis and the base of the Caucasus Mountains.

"I did so, and finally landed at Baku, on the shores of the Caspian Sea. Here I met a harum scarum young Englishman, Jack Wall, who was all intent upon a daring trip through Kirghaz Tartary.

"Everybody knows what a villainous race of people these Kirghiz are.

"The Kurds, their neighbors, are bad enough in the line of banditti, but the Kirghiz are a bad lot.

"However, I was just reckless enough to fall in with the plan. We left Baku one day on a sailing vessel, and proceeded up the Caspian to Gourief at the mouth of the Ural River.

"From thence it is a westerly course to the steppes of Tartary. We equipped ourselves with stout ponies, weapons and camp equipments, and started.

"A foolhardy proceeding, no doubt you will say. Two of us, not greatly experienced in the ways of the country or the manners of the people, and yet we were taking mighty chances.

"We took no guide or bodyguard, for we well knew their treachery.

"Well, we made very excellent progress for a few hundred miles. We left the border settlements behind and soon were upon the boundless steppes.

"Here we had plenty of fun fighting wolves and bears, and having an occasional skirmish with wandering Kirghiz.

"But we had famous luck until we reached a point not far from the Tshingkins Tan Mountains, beyond which is the lower Siberian province of Tomsk.

"One day we were riding across a green plain when a strange looking man on a pony came dashing toward us.

"He was almost devoid of clothing, and with his long beard and hair looked like a veritable wild man.

"You can imagine our surprise.

"He behaved himself in a frantic fashion at sight of us, waving his arms wildly and shouting in good English:

"'God be praised! You are my countrymen! I am saved—saved!'

"'Heavens!' I said to Jack. 'He is one of our people.'

"'Sure enough,' said Jack.

"What was he doing here?

"But we waited until the rider came up. He leaped from his pony, and ran up and wildly embraced us.

"He was a man of fifty years, and an Englishman.

"'Heaven be praised!' he cried, wildly. 'I cannot tell you how glad I am to find my own people once more!'

"Of course, Jack and I at once asked him how he came to be in this region and in such a plight. Whereupon he told us a story which made the blood almost curdle in our veins.

"He said his name was James Westervelt, and that he was a native of Birmingham, England—a wealthy merchant.

"He had been sojourning in Moscow with his young and beautiful daughter, Madge.

"One day a friend obtained from the Czar a permit to

visit the prisons of Siberia. They were to have a guard and safe escort.

"It was a rare honor, and they accepted it with delight. But one day, between Tobolsk and Beretchinska they were suddenly attacked by a band of brigands.

"Their guard was slaughtered, and they were made captives. Their captor sold them to a Tartar chief, and they finally found their way into the mountain retreat of Mardo Turgi, the cruelest of the Tartar brigands, who told them that they would be held for ransom, in failure of which they would be killed.

"Letters were sent by poor Westervelt, but they were never answered. The Tartar chief became impatient, and matters were serious, until one day Westervelt made his escape.

"His hope was to reach England and intercede for the rescue of his daughter Madge.

"Thus we found him upon the desert steppes. A wild desire seized us to attempt the rescue of Madge Westervelt.

"We fed Westervelt and gave him some clothing. Then we attempted an excursion of rescue into the mountains.

"But we speedily found the Kirghiz so numerous and so well fortified, that it was wholly out of the question to attempt by any strategy whatever to accomplish our ends.

"The only method of rescuing Madge was by fighting them; but we finally hit upon a strategic plan.

"A message was sent to Mardo Turgi by one of the Tartars whom we captured.

"We offered to treat with him for ransom, provided he would wait until one of us could go to England and back. We named ten months as the limit. He wanted one million dollars in gold for the ransom fee.

"This would bankrupt poor Westervelt; but he was nevertheless willing to pay it to save his daughter.

"But an idea came to me, and I hastened to put it into execution.

"I left Wall and Westervelt at Gourief on the Ural, and traveled by quickest stages to Constantinople, and thence to London and to America. Here I am, after a hard trip, in your presence. I thought of you, and as I live, Frank, I believe you are the only man in the world to-day who has it in his power to save the Tartar's captive, beautiful Madge Westervelt."

Frank Reade, Jr., had listened to this thrilling recital from first to last with the keenest kind of interest. His face glowed, his eyes shone with excitement, and he drew a deep breath as Ward finished.

"My God!" he exclaimed, "that is a terrible tale. And

do you mean to say that the girl is yet in the power of the Kirghiz?"

"I do."

"Great Heaven! That is awful! And you have come to me for aid?"

"Yes."

"But—I am powerless. What can I do in the matter?"

"Frank, you are a great inventor. You have an air-ship——"

"Ah! That was wrecked!" said Frank, in despair. "It would take too long to build another."

Nicholas Ward sprang to his feet.

"Frank, don't say that you cannot help us!" he cried, excitedly. "Think of that poor father; think of that beautiful girl and what her fate will be. Think of it and refuse if you can!"

The appeal was a passionate and powerful one.

Frank Reade, Jr., in much agitation paced the floor for a moment. Then his face lit up with sudden resolution.

"I can and will save her!" he cried.

CHAPTER II.

ON THE STEPPES.

The announcement had such an effect upon Nick Ward that he rushed forward and threw his arms around Frank.

"God bless you!" he cried. "I knew you would not refuse, Frank."

"Of course I would not," replied the young inventor. "I was only driven to a sore trait to think of some feasible plan for accomplishing the purpose."

"I thought of your air-ship."

"Yes; if I had an air-ship constructed we would have no difficulty whatever."

"But what is your plan?"

Frank looked thoughtful and did not answer for a moment.

Then he suddenly turned and said:

"You say these Kirghiz are hard fighters?"

"Warriors from the cradle."

"But they have no cannon or anything of that sort?"

"Oh, no."

Frank walked back and forth for some moments.

"Did you confer with the English consul at Constantinople?" he asked.

"I did."

"What did he say?"

"He said he would present the matter to the Porte, but he said that neither the Turkish nor the Russian governments could deal effectually with the Tartar brigands in their remote quarters. It would require an army sent thither, which neither power would do."

"I see the point," said Frank. "The position is indeed a hard one. But we will save her if it is in human power to do so. I have no air-ship at present; but, as luck has it, I have just finished an invention which I think will be even better for the purpose."

"What is that?" cried Ward, eagerly.

"I call it my Electric Terror, the Thunderer. I could not have devised anything better for the purpose required."

"That is an ominous name," laughed Ward.

"And on ominous machine," said Frank.

"Is it perfected?"

"Quite! I had intended taking a trip down into the Apache country with it, but it will travel the steppes instead."

"I know that you will realize the prime importance of immediate action."

"You need fear nothing on that score. If the Thunderer goes to Tartary, she will be packed and aboard the train for New York City to-morrow."

"Good!" cried Nick, joyfully. "I would give much for a look at this wonderful invention."

"You shall have it."

Frank led the way into the hall and called Pomp.

"Have the carriage brought around at once," he ordered.

"A'right, Marse Frank," said the darky.

Frank and his visitor stood upon the front steps and chatted pleasantly until the carriage came.

Then they were driven down to the big machine shops.

Frank led the way in the big yard. There, where the workmen had just run it out from the shop, was the new invention, the Thunderer.

And as Nick Ward gazed at it he gave an exclamation of wonderment and delight.

He saw the theory and practicability of the machine at a glance.

"Wonderful!" he cried. "Upon my word, Frank, it is just the thing for the steppes!"

The Thunderer was, as Frank had said truly, an ominous machine.

The body was cigar-shaped, with keen rams at either end. It was of lightest steel, rolled fine and hard, and

while not impervious to a cannon ball, would easily withstand bullets.

There were seven circular bull's-eye windows in the hull. At either end there was a porthole, through which projected the barrel of a pneumatic dynamite gun, a wonderful invention of Frank's.

The body of the Thunderer rested upon a cleverly constructed framework, with two reversible circles for proper turning of the machine in any direction desired. Eight wheels with broad-grooved tires, with axles driven by electric shafts connecting with the electrical machinery inside the hull.

By this arrangement the Thunderer could be made to move in any direction desired.

Upon the top of the hull was a square frame, with a thin network of finest steel to cover it. This made a sort of deck upon which the voyagers could sit and view the country about.

There were loopholes in this netting to fire through in case of an attack.

Above the network was the tower or pilot-house, and at the top of that was a powerful electric searchlight.

Entrance to the Thunderer was effected by means of a gang ladder leading up to a door in the network. So made for the external appearance of the machine.

Frank now took his visitor on board the Thunderer.

The hull was divided into three compartments.

The one in the center, and connected by stairway with the pilot-tower, was the dynamo and engine room.

Here the subtle electrical machinery, the outgrowth of Frank Reade, Jr.'s clever brain, was to be seen.

Forward was a delightful cabin, fitted up luxuriously with rich furniture, a small library, valuable charts, instruments and curios.

Aft, or properly, at the other end of the Thunderer, were the sleeping rooms and bunks.

Of these there were seven, which was the largest number of passengers the Thunderer could carry. Frank unlocked the door of one, and said:

"This shall be yours, Nick!"

The young American was delighted. He could hardly contain himself.

"It will be simply grand traveling across the steppes this way!" he declared. "And we shall certainly succeed in defeating Mardo Turgi and rescuing Madge!"

Frank Reade, Jr.'s intention to visit Tartary with the Thunderer leaked out in some way that evening, and before morning the news had been telegraphed to every city in the United States.

A tremendous sensation was created, especially in official circles at Washington.

By order of the President assurances were sent to Frank that he would travel through Asia under the protection of the United States Government and with the Executive sanction.

Everywhere the excitement was most intense, as the romantic nature of Frank's errand was known.

Everybody wished the party the best of success, and mighty throngs gathered in Readestown to see the Thunderer packed aboard a special train.

The machine was safely packed and billed to Constantinople via Mediterranean steamers. Then Frank Reade, Jr., Barney and Pomp, and Nicholas Ward took a train for New York, and later boarded a steamer for Europe.

As the voyage to Constantinople was uneventful we will pass over it quickly, and take the reader to more stirring scenes.

Arrived there Nick found letters from Westervelt and Jack Wall at Gourief.

They were still holding Mardo Turgi's envoy, and were in a very nervous state of mind over the situation.

"We will relieve their minds very quickly, now," said Frank.

Arrangements were made to cross the Black Sea by sailing vessel, and then an overland trip was made to the shores of the Caspian Sea.

All this was safely performed, and the Thunderer placed aboard a vessel on the Caspian Sea, after crossing which the party were really upon the borders of Tartar land.

The Thunderer may be said truly to have created a sensation in the country through which it passed.

Indeed, among the barbarous settlements along the borders of the Caspian Sea some of the natives essayed a hostile attitude.

But they were hardly strong enough in numbers to make an attack, and no trouble was encountered of any serious kind.

Many curious people were seen and many strange scenes.

Kurds formed the bulk of the population, and they were at all times surly and uncommunicative.

Frank was careful to avoid a close encounter with any of them.

At one village the head sheik or ruler appeared and savagely threatened dire things if the Thunderer attempted to pass through the place.

Frank could easily have blown the village to atoms with his pneumatic guns, but he stuck to his conservative course,

and rather than have trouble yielded to the cranky old pasha's command and made a circuit of the town.

But now the Turks and their ilk had been left behind.

The Thunderer was really in wild Tartary, and thrilling adventures were in store for them.

Nick Ward had written to Westervelt and Wall appointing a place of meeting.

This was at a small Tartar settlement upon an arm of the Caspian.

The people here received the travelers quite hospitably, and it was decided to make this a rendezvous for all future operations.

The name of the place was Irluk, and arrangements were made with the inhabitants for the procuring of necessary supplies there.

Two days the party waited at Irluk for the coming of the two men.

But neither showed up, nor was any word received from them.

"That is queer," said Nick Ward, anxiously. "They ought to be right on hand. There is something wrong."

"Perhaps something has befallen them," ventured Frank.

"I cannot think that," said Nick. "No; they have not received my letter, or they would be here."

"Golly, Marse Frank," said Pomp, with a grimace, "if we stay in dis place much longer, de beggars done git eferfing we hab."

"Be jabbers, that's roight, if yez did say it, naygur," put in Barney.

The two servitors were ever nagging at each other in a good-natured way, and Pomp at once turned upon Barney.

"What am dat yo' say, sah? Jes' yo' pleeze be a leetle bit mo' disrespectful when yo' talks to a gemmen!"

"Begorra, thin I'd niver be afther talkin' to yez at all!" said Barney, with a grimace.

Pomp made a whack at Barney with a deck swab, which he had in his hand.

The Irishman dodged so quickly that the darky lost his footing, and swinging about went down upon his flat nose.

When he scrambled up the claret was bursting from it in torrents.

Barney screaming with laughter made a dive for the cabin to escape a rush by Pomp.

But as he reached the stairs he missed his footing and slid the whole length of them on his spine.

"Och, murther!" he howled. "Shure, it's kilt I am intoirely."

It was now Pomp's turn to laugh, and he did right royally between his efforts to keep his nose straight.

But at this moment a startled cry from Nick Ward caused the two skylarkers to forget their jokes.

They scrambled forward to where Frank Reade, Jr., and Nick were.

And as they did so a thrilling sight rewarded the gaze of all.

CHAPTER III.

THRILLING NEWS.

Down the village street came a horse and rider.

The rider was a specimen of the Tartar race, and dressed in their wild and picturesque fashion.

But just now his person was in a sad plight. His clothing was torn, his face blood stained and ashen white, and he leaned heavily over the pommel of his saddle.

He rode straight up to the Thunderer and threw himself from the saddle.

"Messieurs, I ask your attention!" he cried, in French.

In a moment Frank and Nick were by his side.

But he fell in a faint before them.

A draught of brandy, however, brought him to, and he revived and looked up.

"Well," said Frank, in French, "what is it and who are you?"

"I am the only one left alive, monsieur!" he said. "You see—we left Gourief three days ago. In a mountain pass we were set upon by Kirghiz, and all were killed but me."

"My God!" cried Nick, with an awful wail. "Jack Wall, my dear friend, is dead! He and Westervelt——"

But the young American paused.

He bent down over the wounded man, and his voice had a terrible ring as he said:

"Now, look here, man, no fooling or you die! Did you see my friends killed with **your own** eyes?"

"Ah, monsieur, there is no hope!"

"Answer me! Did you see them killed?"

"No, monsieur; but they were captured, and the Kirghiz always kill their prisoners. They are dead before this."

There was a wild, desperate light in Nick's eyes as he sprang up.

"There is a chance!" he cried. "Frank, we must act! There is no time to lose if we would save them!"

"I am ready," said Frank Reade, Jr. "Which way is it?"

"What pass is it that you were attacked in?" asked Nick.

"Monsieur, it was the Pass of the Volti," replied Tartar.

Nick drew some gold coins from his pocket.

He thrust them into the fellow's hand, and cried:

"You have been faithful and you deserve reward. and have your wounds cared for and await our return."

Then Nick and Frank scrambled aboard the Thunderer.

Barney and Pomp flew to the engine room.

Frank went into the pilot tower, and Nick sat by side and directed the course of the Thunderer.

They were running directly for the Volti Pass by the nearest route.

The region upon the borders of the Caspian Sea Nick knew well.

Out upon the level steppes the Thunderer ran. Upon level ground like this it was not difficult for the machine to attain the speed of a railroad train.

Over the ground they flew at frightful speed.

Far ahead a drove of elk were seen. But as the Thunderer came on, with a roar and rush the animals fled.

Now a band of prowling Kirghiz were seen ahead.

Mounted upon their swift ponies they tried to outrun the Thunderer, but they might have spared themselves that trouble.

They were distanced almost before they were able to get under way.

On went the Thunderer like a locomotive on a rampart. On and on, faster and faster.

Mile after mile sped by.

Forty, sixty, one hundred were covered and scarcely ten hours had passed.

But this rate of speed could not be kept up forever, and it came to a sudden stop.

A river lay in their path.

But Frank had provided for this.

There were propeller blades to fit on the wheels, and a temporary rudder for the rear of the craft, for such might now be called.

In the water, the Thunderer was capable of floating easily, and even maintaining a fair rate of speed.

Into the water the Thunderer slid and made its way with rapid speed to the opposite shore.

Then the propeller blades were taken in, and the Thunderer ran up on the shore.

Once more it went thundering across the plain like a whirlwind.

Mile after mile sped by, and at length Nick Ward studied the distant horizon through his glasses, and cried:

"There is the Volti range of hills. We are right in the heart of the Kirghiz country!"

"Then we may look for squalls," said Frank Reade, Jr. "Exactly! We cannot be too careful in proceeding."

"Golly!" exclaimed Pomp, "dis chile done fink dem callions bettah not git in de way ob de Thunderer!"

"Ah, but I can tell you they are not a foe to be despised," said Nick.

"I agree with you," said Frank. "It will at least be well to use due caution. They might lay some sort of a fatal trap for us. Of course, in the open field no doubt we could defeat them, with the aid of the electric guns. But in the hills it will not be so easy."

"Just the idea," said Nick, eagerly. "You can see my trap, Frank?"

"I can. Now, you are sure that those are the hills in which your friends are held as prisoners?"

"If the Tartar messenger at Irluk is to be believed. It must be true."

"I think so. Yonder is the Volti Pass."

Frank saw a mighty cleft in the mountain wall. Beyond it were visible jagged peaks and caps.

The country was extremely wild and primitive. The name of all sorts abounded, and there were no evidences whatever of any of the perquisites of civilization or husbandry. Not even a peasant's hut had been seen in the hundred miles.

It was just such a wild, unsettled region as brigands would select for a stronghold.

Frank carefully studied the pass and the hills about. Of course none in the party knew exactly where the Kirghiz robbers had their den.

That it was somewhere in the hills it was certain.

But they were not destined to remain long inactive.

Suddenly, as Nick was studying a part of the hills through his glass, he gave a sharp cry.

In an instant Frank was by his side.

"What is it?" he asked. "Have you made a discovery?" "Yes," replied Nick, excitedly.

"What?"

"Just look up yonder on that spur of the mountain."

Frank turned his glass in the direction indicated.

He was given a stunning surprise.

Around a spur of the mountain, and following a rudely beaten path, were a number of mounted men.

They looked like Armenians more than Tartars, and a pack of mules followed them heavily laden.

"Do you see them?" asked Nick.

"Yes," replied Frank.

"Well, what do you think?"

"They do not look like Tartars."

"No."

"Can they be of the robber band?"

Nick shook his head.

"No," he replied, decisively. "And that is the very strangest part of it. How they have dared to pass these hills is a mystery to me, unless——"

"What?"

"They are a part of the robber band in disguise."

The two youths gazed at each other.

"Do you believe that?" Frank asked.

Nick slapped his knee vigorously, and cried:

"No; I do not! They are Armenian traders from Tobolsk, going to Constantinople, and they are taking mighty chances for the sake of trading in the peaceable Tartar settlements along the Caspian Sea."

It looked as if Nick had hit right. Frank nodded approvingly.

"I guess you are right, Nick," he said; "but they seem to be traveling along safely just now."

"True; and yet they are right in the very heart of the robber's retreat."

This was certainly an anomalous condition of affairs. The traveling Armenians were watched with interest for awhile.

Slowly they descended the mountain path, until the mountain wall hid them from further view.

They must in a few moments reach the bed of the pass, and it could not take them a great while to emerge upon the plain.

They had not seemed to perceive the presence of the Thunderer.

But the machine was in the shadow of a clump of trees, and this may have afforded the explanation.

After the party had disappeared from view, Frank Reade, Jr., drew a deep breath.

"Well, what do you think of it?" asked Nick.

"If that party of traders, rich with money and fine goods, can safely travel through the Volti Pass, then certainly the robbers have either deserted their stronghold, or for some reason they fear to attack the party."

"You are right," agreed Nick. "Well, I can talk a little in the Armenian tongue, and when the traders appear we will confer with them."

"A good idea!"

Nick lit a cigar and strolled up and down upon the

screened deck of the Thunderer. Frank went into the cabin a moment.

Perhaps thirty minutes passed, and yet the Armenians did not appear.

Nick was beginning to get impatient.

A fear seized him that they had found some other method of leaving the hills than by the pass. But second thought assured him that this could not be so.

But suddenly a sound reached his ears which drove the color from his face.

This was the report of firearms and the sound of shouts and cries from the distance.

Nick rushed to the cabin door, and shouted, excitedly:

"Frank, come quick! The traders have been attacked by the robbers!"

Frank heard this with a thrill, and sprang to the cabin stairs. A moment later he was by Nick's side.

"You don't mean it!" he gasped.

"Listen!"

There was no denying the fact.

The sounds of the conflict came plainly to the hearing of all.

This was enough for Frank.

"Barney, Pomp!" he cried. "Go to your places in the engine-room. We must save those people at all hazards!"

Frank himself sprang into the pilot-tower. The Thunderer leaped ahead and made for the mouth of the pass at terrific speed.

The intervening distance was quickly covered. The pass was opened before them. A wide cut with a smooth floor over which the machine bowled rapidly.

For some hundred yards into the pass the Thunderer found no obstacle. But now one presented itself.

A landslide had caused two large trees to fall athwart the pass.

These blocked it only to the height of a couple of feet, and travelers found no difficulty in leaping their horses over the obstruction.

But it was sufficient to effectually block the wheels of the machine. The Thunderer came to a full stop.

What was to be done? It was extremely important that the obstruction should be removed.

CHAPTER IV.

A TRUCE PARLEY.

Meanwhile, the sounds from the conflict going on above were of a terrible sort.

There was the crash of firearms, the clash of arms and yells and agonized cries of victims. There was no doubt but that the traders were getting the worst of the fight.

Frank heard and realized all this.

It endowed him with a feeling akin to desperation. He was anxious to go to the rescue of the Armenians, and knew the necessity of prompt action.

But how was the Thunderer to pass this obstacle? It surely could not break through nor run over it.

It could be cut away with axes, but this would require time, and by the time it was accomplished it might be too late to render the unfortunate Armenians any service.

"Great Heavens!" exclaimed Nick, desperately. "Is there no way to get over that barrier, Frank?"

"There must be," replied the young inventor.

"Hark! I believe they are cutting the poor chaps all to pieces!"

"There is no doubt of it."

But at that supreme moment an idea came to Frank.

"I have it!" he cried.

He went to the pilot-house and backed the Thunderer some two hundred feet from the obstruction.

Then he went to the forward gun and charged the pneumatic chamber. A dynamite projectile was inserted.

His purpose was seen by the others, and Pomp cried:

"Golly! I done fink dat will fix dat obstruckshun mighty quick. It am a suah fing."

"Be jabers, I'm glad I'm not on the top av it," said Barney.

Frank sighted the gun and pulled the valve open.

There was a slight shock, a recoil, and the projectile struck the obstruction. The result was terrific.

The air was filled with flying debris, and in less than a second the smoke cleared away and showed the floor of the pass to be clear of obstructions.

Only a heap of splinters and of pulverized stone occupied the spot.

A cheer went up from the voyagers, and the Thunderer went forward once more.

Up the pass it thundered at full speed.

A long stretch of level floor was covered, then several angles were turned, and they came out in a sort of depression in the heart of the mountains.

This covered, perhaps, six or seven acres, and was smooth and level like the floor of the pass itself.

It was in this place that the Armenians had been attacked by the Kirghiz.

But now as the Thunderer appeared upon the scene, the

sight which rewarded the gaze of the voyagers was an astounding one.

Not a living man was in sight.

The battle had been fought and was over. It seemed incredible, yet there was the awful testimony.

There had been twenty-five in the traders' party.

Of these not one was left alive.

Their bodies, horribly mutilated, were lying about the place. The robbers had slaughtered them like sheep, rifled their persons, and driven off their pack mules.

Our adventurers gazed upon the scene with horror.

Not one of the Armenians but had been beheaded, so there was no possibility that any of them were alive. A more horrible massacre human mind could not conceive.

All gazed upon it aghast.

"My soul!" exclaimed Frank Reade, Jr., with horror. "I have always considered the Tartar race as barbaric, but that there could exist such an inhuman set of wolves seems incredible."

"Indeed, you are right," said Nick. "I told you they were a hard lot, Frank. I lived among them, and had a good chance to observe."

"What chance is there then of our finding your friends alive?"

"There is but one."

"And that?"

"Possibly they may have spared their lives in the hope of gaining ransom. The Tartar is fond of money obtained in that way."

"It is a slender hope."

"Slender, indeed! But it is enough to cling to."

"Very true. We will not abandon it."

The Thunderer went on through the pass for some distance in pursuit of the Kirghiz.

But they had taken narrow mountain paths, which the Thunderer could not follow.

For the time it seemed useless to attempt to overtake them.

This could only be done by essaying a sally from the machine, and this would be attended by too much risk.

So Frank reversed the lever and sent the Thunderer bowling back to the scene of the massacre.

It was indeed a terrible scene. But as the party gazed upon it there was the sudden crack of rifles, and a storm of bullets struck the Thunderer.

Of course no harm was done.

The bullets only rattled harmlessly against the steel netting.

But where did they come from? For some moments this was a mystery to the voyagers.

Nick had thought of leaving the Thunderer for a moment, but if he had done so no doubt his life would have paid the forfeit.

"Jericho!" he exclaimed, in amazement. "Where did that compliment come from?"

"That is a mystery," said Frank.

"Golly, Marse Frank," cried Pomp, "I done fink I can tell you."

"Eh, where?" asked Frank.

The darky pointed up to the edge of a cliff which was lined with bowlders. From behind one of these a faint wreath of smoke was seen ascending.

This was the only clew, but it would seem a sufficient one.

No doubt behind that bowlder there lurked a number of the Kirghiz who had fired this volley at the Thunderer as a test.

Frank studied the cliff's edge a moment.

"Upon my word," he cried, "I do believe that is their hiding place!"

"Ob co'se it is, Marse Frank!" cried Pomp. "Don' yo se de puff ob smoke?"

"I believe Pomp is right!" declared Nick. "We will wait awhile. They may fire again."

Several minutes passed.

Pomp and Barney were at the loopholes watching eagerly for a head to appear from behind the bowlders.

It would have been a sad thing for the owner if such a thing had occurred.

But it did not.

The Kirghiz proved wily foes, and discreetly kept their hiding place. After awhile Frank said:

"There is no doubt but that they are up there, eh, Nick?"

"I believe it!" replied the young American traveler.

"They are too wise to show themselves!"

"Yes."

"All right. I will fix up a nice little dose for them, then!"

Frank went forward to the pneumatic gun. He elevated it to the right angle, and sighted the bowlders above.

Then he opened the air valve and put in a projectile.

There was a hissing sound, a shock, and an object went tearing through the air. It struck the bowlders full and fair.

A terrific explosion was the result, and a mighty tongue of flame shot up into the air.

The dynamite had exploded, and the rocks were reduced to powder.

The bodies of half a dozen Kirghiz were hurled aloft.

A number of the survivors were seen fleeing up the mountain side.

Barney and Pomp opened fire upon these. The assault of the Kirghiz upon the Thunderer had not proved a success.

Frank was well pleased with the result of the shot.

"That will inform them that we mean business!" he cried.

"You are right," agreed Nick. "It is a pity there couldn't have been more of them in that scrape."

"We will fetch the others yet," said Frank, confidently.

"What do you suppose they think of the Thunderer, now?"

"I can't imagine. I hope it will terrify them into releasing the prisoners."

But Nick shook his head.

"There is scant hope of that," he said; "they will likely go home and kill them now, if they haven't done so already."

"Do you believe it?"

"I fear it."

"What can we do?"

"We are powerless!" groaned Nick.

Barney and Pomp had been testing their skill at hitting the fleeing Kirghiz. Suddenly Barney ceased firing.

"Be jabbers," he cried, "phwhat do yez call that, naygur? On me word, I believe it is a flag of truce!"

This seemed a fact.

Upon a spur of the cliff there suddenly appeared one of the Kirghiz band.

He carried in his hand a white flag, which he waved vigorously.

It was certainly intended for a truce.

"A truce!" cried Nick.

"Begorra, they've come to their sinses at lasht!" cried Barney. "Shure, they want to speak to us!"

Frank boldly stepped out of the cage and made a reassuring motion to the Kirghiz envoy.

The fellow descended from his perch and approached Frank.

He was a tall, strapping fellow, with muscles like an ox. But his features were coarse and heavy and of the most brutal type.

He was dressed in the barbaric fashion of the Kirghiz Tartar, with the skins of wild animals forming half of his costume.

He made a queer sort of salute with the palms of his hands, and then stood facing Frank in a leering, defiant manner.

The young inventor addressed him in French, but the fellow shook his head.

He did not understand it.

Then he tried German, Italian and Spanish, but the fellow each time looked blank.

At this moment Nick came to the rescue.

"Hold on, Frank!" he cried, "I can talk with that fellow."

"All right," said the young inventor. "If that is the case, come along."

Nick was not slow to comply.

He leaped down from his perch and approached the truce bearer.

"Well, what can we do for you?" he said, in the Turkish language.

The fellow's face assumed an expression of comprehension, and he replied:

"I come from Modak Khan, the king of these hills. He demands the meaning of your presence here."

"Why does he make that demand?" asked Nick, defiantly. "He don't own these hills."

"This is the territory of Modak. He demands that you leave it at once, or your heads shall be cut off!"

"Humph!" said Nick, contemptuously. "Mighty little we care for that."

"What do you want here?"

"We are here to demand of Modak Kahn that he release two English prisoners he has in keeping for ransom. Modak Khan is a robber and a scoundrel. If he does not comply with this demand we shall see that he is skinned alive. Go to him and tell him that. We will give you one minute to get out of sight."

With which terse ultimatum Nick pulled out his watch.

The fellow took the hint and slid out of sight.

But he paused at the edge of the cliff just long enough to thunder back:

"Modak Khan am I. Dogs of Christians, I will have your hearts for this!"

CHAPTER V.

THE KHAN ENTRAPPED.

"Thunder!" exclaimed Nick, in amazement. "Don't tell me that that was Modak. If I had only—but no, it

as a flag of truce and could not be broken. But if we could get that wretch in our power the game would be ours."

"You are right!" cried Frank, with sudden inspiration. "Is there no way to do it?"

Nick was thoughtful for a moment.

"Yes," he cried, "I believe there is!"

"How?"

"You know that this is only a part of the Khan's gang in these hills. The real stronghold no doubt is far from here."

"Well?"

"They will not return there at once, and Westervelt and all in the meantime are safe. But the moment Modak returns thither he will, no doubt, cause them to be executed."

"Ah!"

"Now, the dodge is to catch the old rogue before he can return to his den."

Frank caught the idea.

"You are right, Nick!" he cried; "that is the game. I am with you."

"The way to do it, I believe, is by following up the fight closely."

"Yes."

"In order to do that we will need to decoy the wretches out of their present strong position."

"But can that be done?"

"I see no reason why. Let me think of some good plan."

Nick knit his brows in a perplexed way, and strode up and down for a few moments. Then he suddenly exclaimed:

"I have got it!"

"Good enough," said Frank. "What is the plan?"

"We will return to the plain and make a feint to leave the vicinity. They are not savages if their curiosity does not lead them to follow us."

"Well?"

"Then once out upon the plain, it will be a simple matter to pretend to run away from them. They will pursue, and we will then turn upon them. The Thunderer will cut their horses, and we shall be able to capture any of them we choose."

"Modak Khan preferred."

"Exactly."

"Nick, you are a born general," said Frank, in complimentary terms. "You have hit the best possible scheme we could work. Here is for success!"

They sprang up the gang ladder and reached the door in the cage.

Crack-ack-crack!

The rattle of bullets came down upon the cage. Just in time the two voyagers sprang inside and closed the door.

The treacherous Kirghiz had rallied and fired a volley at them.

One of the bullets penetrated Frank's sleeve and another grazed Nick's finger, but no further harm was done.

It was a close shave.

"Jericho!" gasped Nick; "that was a powerful close call."

Frank's face flushed angrily.

"I will teach them a lesson for that!" he cried.

He was about to spring to the electric gun, but second thought checked him.

"Hold on a bit, Frank!" said Nick. "Everything is now in our favor."

"I believe you!" cried Frank. "Let us make the run at once."

The young inventor gave hurried instructions to Barney what to do.

The Celt hurried to the pilot-house, and at once started the Thunderer for the open plain. In a very short time they emerged from the pass and reached the steppes.

It was a clever dodge.

At a slow and lumbering pace the Thunderer started out upon the plain.

All the way down the pass the machine had been pursued by a shower of bullets. The Kirghiz were confident that their foe were fleeing from a sense of fear.

Triumphant cries and derisive yells burst from their lips, and they came on at full speed in the pursuit.

The Kirghiz are among the finest horsemen in the world.

In a twinkling, from a hiding place in the hills, they had brought forth their horses, and now half a hundred of them were riding madly over the plain in pursuit.

Frank could easily have trained the pneumatic gun upon them and have blown them to atoms.

But this was not the game.

Nick was in high spirits, and rubbed his hands with glee.

"Could anything have worked better, Frank?" he cried.

"It is just as we want it."

"You're right, Nick," said the young inventor, grimly.

"We'll give them a bit of a surprise party."

"You're right we will."

"Is not that Modak Khan riding ahead?"

"Yes."

"He is the man we want. Let the others all go!"

"Exactly."

The Thunderer kept along at the same pace. The ponies of the Kirghiz could outfoot it, and the barbarians kept up a steady fire upon the machine.

It was not answered by the voyagers for politic reasons. Nothing could have worked with better success.

Several miles were covered in this manner.

Then Nick called to Frank:

"Now is the time!"

"Ah right!"

The young inventor sprang into the pilot-tower. He seized the wheel from Barney's hand.

"Go to the pneumatic gun, Barney," he said, "and await my orders."

"All roight, sor."

Away went Barney. Frank now turned the Thunderer sharply to the right and singled Modak Khan out from the others.

Straight for him the Thunderer made.

The nimble pony at first managed to keep out of the way. But this was only for a time.

The speed of the machine was increased, and the Kirghiz warrior became alarmed.

The bullets fired by the gang did not seem to have any effect upon the machine, and now that it turned upon them they began to see their mistake.

Frank shouted quick orders to Barney.

The Celt trained the pneumatic gun upon the Kirghiz and opened the valve.

There was a terrific explosion in their midst as the projectile exploded, and dozens of them were torn to pieces.

The others in terror scattered across the plain like sheep.

Frank singled out Modak Kahn, and pursued him hotly. In a hundred yards the Thunderer had overtaken him.

Pomp with skillful aim brought his pony down, and the Kirghiz chief tumbled upon the ground half stunned.

Before he could recover himself, or make further effort to escape the Thunderer had halted, and Barney and Pomp springing out bound him hand and foot and dragged him aboard.

The mighty robber Kahn was a prisoner, and a great stroke had been made by the rescuing party.

Upon realizing his position the Kahn showed his cowardice by going into a frenzy and humbly begging for his life.

"You will not kill me, effendi!" he cried, in the Turkish language, to Frank. "Spare my life!"

"Upon one condition," said Frank, feigning fierceness, "we will permit you to live."

"What is that?" asked the captive, humbly.

"That you will release the two English prisoners you have, and allow them to return safely to us!"

The Khan's eyes gleamed with a cunning light. Nick saw this.

"Effendi shall have his wish," he said to Nick. "Set me free and I will in turn set your two friends free."

"No harm must be done them, or you die!" said Frank.

"I will go at once and set them free," said the wretch.

Nick had acted all this while as interpreter. He shrugged his shoulders.

"Humph!" he said, with a laugh. "You are a cunning rascal, Modak Kahn. Suppose we set you free now, when you get back to the safety of the hills you will forget your promise."

The defeat of the barbarian showed itself in his treacherous eyes. He appeared dejected.

"I will swear by the Prophet!" he said.

"We don't want your oath," said Nick, sternly. "And we mean business. You must call for one of your men and send him with an order for the prisoners. When they are brought here safe and well then we will allow you to go."

The wretch's eyes gleamed.

"No one but Modak can open the door of the prison and set them free," he said.

"That is nonsense," declared Nick. "But I see. You cannot bring your mind to it. You have got to die!"

Modak looked defiant.

It was plainly his belief that he would yet bluff his captors out of the decision. Nick turned and winked to Frank.

The latter gave a whispered order to Barney.

The Celt came up from the engine-room with the end of a long wire in his hand.

He uncoiled it until he had reached the chair in which the Kirghiz sat.

Barney had on insulated gloves, and handled the wire, which was a live one, with impunity and ease.

"Shure, Misther Frank," he said, with a comical grimace, "it's meself as awaits your ordhers, sor."

"Put the wire to his feet first," said Frank. "Give him quite a shock."

"All roight, sor."

Barney applied the live wire lightly to Modak's feet.

The effect was thrilling.

The barbarian's muscles began to tingle and contract, then a yell of pain and horror escaped his lips.

Yell after yell pealed from his lips, and Barney withdrew the wire. He was a penitent Kirghiz, and willing now to agree to anything.

He could not understand in the crudeness of his nature that it was that had hurt him.

But the pain had made a tremendous impression upon

He readily agreed to Nick's demand.

They were now near the mouth of the pass. A number of the robbers hovered there, anxious to learn the fate of the chief.

Nick went out and waved a flag of truce.

Very soon one of the robbers came up to the Thunderer,

and cast himself down in an abject way for salutation.

Nick turned to Modak, and said:

"Here is one of your men. You can send him."

The Tartar chief crept close to the steel netting of the

pass, and gave his followers some explicit directions in the Tartar tongue.

The fellow hurried away, and then Frank Reade, Jr., and

Modak grasped hands, and the latter said:

"Frank, we have done it."

"You are right."

"Fortune is with us."

"I hope it will continue."

"It may; but I have an idea that Mardo Turgi is a harder

man to beat than Modak. But we must in some way res-

cue Madge Westervelt."

"We will do it."

While waiting for the return of the messenger, the Tar-

chief remained sullen and morose.

This did not disturb the voyagers at all. Time passed,

but the messenger did not return.

The robber Kahn kept a sharp and eager lookout. But

the hours passed and the messenger did not return, he

soon got uneasy.

No wonder, for his life depended upon his success in re-

turning the prisoners safe and well.

CHAPTER VI.

BROUGHT TO TERMS.

Modak Khan's life was at stake, and it did not seem

probable that he would give his messenger other than ex-

act orders to return with the prisoners.

But the time was up and they did not come.

But he did not feel more anxious than the friends of the

prison-

ers. Nick Ward walked up and down the cage in a state of

great anxiety.

He knew well enough what it meant if the messenger did not return.

It meant that all was over with the prisoners, and that they had been executed. Suspense most terrible weighed upon the party.

Darkness was near at hand.

Modak Khan's face grew black and ugly. He muttered fierce things under his huge mustache.

Suddenly he addressed Nick in the Turkish language:

"Effendi, have you seen aught of my servant yet?"

"He does not come!" replied Nick, coolly. "Can you explain?"

The Kahn muttered an Oriental oath.

"By the beard of the Prophet, I will have his head!" he roared. "What ho! bring me another slave!"

He was in earnest in what he said, and Nick saw this. So the young American traveler picked up the white flag.

"What do you say, Khan?" he asked. "Do you desire another man?"

"Ay, effendi, I do."

"Very well."

Nick waved the flag, and in response two of the Tartars galloped forth from their retreat in the pass.

They drew rein ten feet from the Thunderer and parleyed with the Kahn.

Modak thundered several fierce orders at them, and they galloped away. Nick turned to Frank with a significant wink.

"That will fetch them," he said. "This is a rare opportunity for you to see some good Tartar bluffing and trickery."

Frank was interested in what Nick said and awaited developments.

Suddenly from the pass there dashed forth at full speed the messenger who has been first dispatched.

His horse was reeking with foam, and he had the appearance of having ridden a great way.

He came up to the cage and made a low salaam. He conversed excitedly with Modak, who pretended to be furious.

Finally, the Khan turned to Nick, and with sorrowful attitude, said:

"My slave brings me sad news, effendi. He says that the prisoners are dead!"

Nick's face for a moment paled.

Had he not been possessed of the ability to easily penetrate the purpose of the wily Kahn, he would have fainted with horror.

As it was he recovered himself with a mighty effort.

Approaching the Kahn he bent over him with his form trembling with passion, and his eyes flashing with hatred and rage.

"Dead!" he said, scathingly; "then they were executed by your orders."

"Nay, effendi," protested the Tartar chief, earnestly, "that is not true. Your friends died of a fever."

Nick was for a moment tempted to brand the wretch as the liar that he was.

But he wisely restrained himself and adopted a more politic course.

"Barney," he said, turning to the Celt, "bring me that live wire again. This fellow needs some more medicine."

The Celt hastened to obey.

At sight of the wire the Khan's face fell, but he was, nevertheless, resolute, until Nick held it to his feet and gave him a gentle shock.

Then a yell of agony escaped him, and he began to beg and pray.

"I thought you would come to your senses," said Nick, coolly. "Now, sir, tell me the truth. You have been lying to me."

The Kahn protested vigorously that he had not.

"You mean to say my friends are dead?"

"They are, noble effendi."

"Then what will you do?"

"Their bodies shall be brought you if you desire."

"But they must be brought to me alive. Do you understand? Your lying game won't work. Bring them to me alive within the hour or you shall die."

Once again Nick placed the live wire at the fellow's feet.

The wretch yelled and begged again. This time all the Tartar trickery was knocked out of him completely.

"Yes, effendi," he cried, "your friends shall come to you alive."

"I thought so," said Nick, triumphantly, turning to Frank Reade, Jr. "A nice little game, was it not?"

"The wretch was lying, then?" said Frank, with surprise.

"Of course he was."

"And they are not dead?"

"Of course not. He tried a little game on us. If I had not bluffed harder than he, our friends would have been brought to us with their heads cut off."

"A Tartar trick," laughed Frank. "You know them well, Nick."

"I ought to. I have lived among the wretches long enough."

"Then you believe that they will bring Westervelt Wall back all safe?"

"You shall see."

Thinking he was unobserved, Modak had been making signs to his distant followers through the wire screen.

But Pomp observed the dodge and told Frank of it. The young inventor told Nick, who only nodded and laughed.

"You will see," he said.

Time passed. Perhaps an hour slipped by. Darkness was now close at hand.

But yet the messenger did not come. Modak Kahn sullen and fierce. He would vouchsafe no conversation whatever.

But the game was won.

Nick had brought the fiery old Tartar to terms in a most hollow manner, thanks to the live electric wire.

Suddenly from the pass there dashed a number of horsemen.

Nick gave a loud cry as he saw two familiar forms among them in their midst. It was Westervelt and Jack Wall.

"Hurrah!" he shouted, "the game is ours. We have won!"

A moment later James Westervelt and Jack Wall were climbing aboard the Thunderer.

They were frantically embraced by Nick, and then quietly introduced to Frank Reade, Jr., and Barney and Pomp.

Westervelt was a fine patrician looking gentleman, possibly sixty years of age. Jack Wall was tall, slender and handsome, and a good mate for Nick Ward.

That was a happy meeting indeed.

The prisoners were a trifle pale and worn from their long captivity, but otherwise they were all right.

After salutations and explanations were over, they looked about them in amazement, and Jack cried:

"But what on earth kind of a vehicle is this, Nick? Where did you find it?"

"It is an invention of Mr. Reade's," replied Nick, "and he is the most famous inventor on the globe to-day."

"Upon my word, but it is a wonderful thing!" declared Westervelt.

It was then in order to show them over the Thunderer and explain its mechanism. Both were delighted.

"It will be easy to whip Mardo Turgi with this machine," cried Westervelt, enthusiastically. "Really, Mr. Reade, it is a wonder."

Staterooms were assigned to the newcomers, and then Nick thought of Modak Kahn.

"By Jupiter!" he exclaimed, "the old fellow will think I don't mean to keep faith with him."

"Set him free, Barney, at once," commanded Frank. Barney hastened to obey. The Tartar chief's bonds were cut, and he was led to the gangway.

He descended, and without a word in a sullen, defiant mood stalked away. A hundred yards out on the plain he was met by a number of his men, and, mounting a pony, he turned and shook his fist in a madly defiant manner at the Thunderer.

His fierce denunciations he hurled at the party who had so easily outwitted him.

Frank Reade, Jr., smiled grimly and went forward to the electric gun.

"I've a mind to give that wretch a good scare," he said. "He deserves it," agreed Nick.

Frank put a projectile into the pneumatic gun and set it so that the dynamite would strike the ground a few yards in front of the defiant Khan and his gang.

When he pulled the valve open.

Westervelt and Wall had watched his movements with great interest. It proved the first time they had seen the pneumatic gun work, and they were deeply interested.

There was a shock, a hissing of air and the projectile left the mouth of the gun.

It struck the ground fairly in front of the ranting Tartar chief.

There was a terrific roar. Sand and stones and turf were hurled fifty feet into the air and a perfect mound of earth ten feet high was raised.

Had Frank seen fit to elevate the gun to the right angle he could have blown the Tartar chief and his companions to eternity.

But that had not been his purpose.

He had intended merely to give the old villain such a scare as he would not soon forget. And he had succeeded.

As soon as the dust cleared away the Tartars were seen galloping like mad upon their ponies for the pass.

Up to this they dashed full tilt and were out of sight.

They did not appear again.

There was a general laugh at the comical spectacle, and the attention was turned to other and more important matters.

The great point had certainly been gained.

The prisoners had been rescued from Modak Khan. It had been a close call, but they had escaped with their lives.

This was something gained. But now a great undertaking lay ahead, and this was to rescue Madge Westervelt.

This was conceded to be more of a task than the one just accomplished.

Mardo Turgi was a greater chief and ruled a great province.

In his own region he was wholly despot, and he could have withstood the attack of a respectable army.

Nick Ward knew this well and told Frank as much.

But the young inventor smiled.

"We will give him a lively time," he said, resolutely, "whether we win or lose."

The province of Madro Turgi was some few hundred miles from the Volti Pass, and deeper in the heart of Kirghiz Tartary.

Before darkness shut down completely the Thunderer was enabled to run a dozen miles, and camp was made upon a small river which flowed across the steppes.

Darkness most profound settled down over the plain.

Pomp cooked a good supper and it was served upon deck. All did justice to it in royal fashion.

Then the dinky got his banjo and played and sang plantation airs.

Barney procured his fiddle and played Irish jigs and sang ballads of the green isle.

The night was made merry for a time.

But the voyagers were not alone in their carnival. Out upon the steppes the wolves were attracted by the sounds, and came down in swarms to investigate matters.

CHAPTER VII.

THE BATTLE WITH WOLVES.

The wolves came swarming about the Thunderer in legions.

Their din was something frightful.

The voyagers on the deck of the Thunderer could hardly hear themselves talk.

Frank turned the searchlight upon the gang, and the scene revealed was one not to be forgotten.

It seemed as if there were thousands of the fierce monsters which came swarming about the machine.

To fire into them was Barney and Pomp's first move.

But the effect was frightful to witness.

The first wolf killed was almost instantly devoured.

Scarcely a tuft of fur was left of his carcass. And so with the others.

The voyagers amused themselves with this manner of destroying the brutes for a time.

Then Frank Reade, Jr., said:

"I will fix them."

"How?" asked Nick, eagerly. "With the dynamite gun?"

"No."

"But it would blow them all to pieces in a jiffy."

"No doubt it would destroy many of them, but that is not the idea. Wait and I will show you."

Frank brought out two long wires from the cabin.

These he trailed behind the Thunderer for several hundred yards by sending the machine ahead for some ways.

Then he connected the wires with the dynamos, and turned the searchlight back upon the struggling mass of wolves.

As the current shot into the wires with the force of several thousand volts, a thrilling scene followed.

In an instant there was a mad yelping, and the mass of wolves were seen in one long line to leap in the air and fall dead in heaps.

Their mates fell upon the carcasses, came in contact with the live wires, and were also killed.

Frank let the Thunderer go ahead at a slow pace, and this pulled the wires right through the pack, killing the wolves right and left.

As it was an unseen power the brutes did not realize their danger, or that their turn was coming next.

The slaughter was something frightful.

It seemed as if thousands of the wolves were piled upon the plain.

Frank, however, tired of the slaughter, and shut off the current.

That was the last of the wolves for that night.

The survivors occupied themselves in feasting upon the remains of their comrades.

Thus the pests were gotten rid of.

Frank allowed the Thunderer to proceed for a dozen miles, with the searchlight to make a clear path ahead.

Then a halt was made, and all retired to rest.

There was need of this, for there was work ahead for the following day.

Pomp was delegated to watch the first half of the night, and Barney the latter half.

All were tired, and readily surrendered to the goddess of slumber.

But their dreams were not to remain undisturbed, as it happened.

The steppes at this point consisted of broad, level plains, overgrown with a crop of dry grass, which beneath burning suns had grown as dry as tinder.

Pomp, who was on guard, was in the pilot-tower, when a sudden, curious thing happened.

There was the clatter of hoofs, and through the glass Pomp saw the form of a horse and rider flash by.

In another moment a second passed upon the other side.

In a moment the darky was all alert.

"Dat am powerful cur'us!" he muttered. "I wonder whatebber dey kin mean, anyway? S'pose I oughter warn Marse Frank."

But the darky concluded he would not as yet do this.

There was as yet no indication of actual danger.

It would be in full time when this should appear.

The darky continued to keep a cautious and careful watch. Time passed slowly.

Pomp's nerves were tense.

Every breath of wind, every rustling of the dry grass warned him for a moment warning of an approaching foe.

But he finally calmed himself after an hour had passed and nothing more was seen of the passing horsemen.

"It am powerful queer who dey was," he muttered, in a mystified way. "Well, I kin jes' warn dem dat dey better not monkey much aroun' dis 'ere chile."

At this moment Pomp heard Barney crawling up the stairs, and knew that his watch was at an end.

Ordinarily this would have delighted the darky, but he was so much interested in the manifestations he had seen that he was loath to leave his post.

Up the stairs into the pilot-house came Barney.

The Celt had the rueful expression upon his face of one who had left a good warm bed, and was loath to leave it.

"Begorra, naygur," he exclaimed, "I wud give yez week's salary for yer part av the noight, av it warn't agin me principles."

"Sho dar, chile!" exclaimed Pomp, earnestly. "Don't yo' fink about dat. Dar am likely to be some funny fink goin' on afo' mornin'. I done fink de bof of us had better be on guard!"

Barney was amazed.

"Phwat's that yez say?" he exclaimed, in amazement. "Do I undherstand yez aright?"

"Huh! I don' see why yo' can't. I spoke good English, sah!"

"Whurroo! av yez wud explain yure meaning I wud loike it better."

"I kin jes' do dat, I'ish, easy enuff."

Then Pomp related the circumstance of the horsemen dashing past the Thunderer.

Barney listened with interest.

"Begorra, there's somethin' in the wind!" he said, with conviction. "Shure, thim war Tartars, as I'm aloive."

"Ob co'se dey was!"

"Begorra, thin, I'm afther thinkin' the both av us betther kape watch!"

"Dat am what I fink."

"All roight, naygur. Wud yez be afther wakin' up Misther Frank?"

"I don' fink ah would yet, I'ish."

"All roight, thin, yez are the boss, an' by the cowl av Mag Murphy's pigs! Whurro! Tare an' 'ounds! Murtherin' blazes! Wud yez luk yender, naygur, an' see the loikes!"

Pomp had seen the thrilling spectacle almost as soon as Barney, however.

The Celt's finger was pointed to the horizon line where a thrilling sight was to be seen.

This was a long line of fire which had suddenly sprang up and seemed running along the horizon at race horse speed.

The plain had been fired.

Almost in an instant it seemed the flames were mountain high and rushing down across the plain like a whirlwind.

They would sweep the whole plain in a destructive manner, and should they overtake the Thunderer its fate would be sealed.

This was certain.

The excitement of Barney and Pomp can hardly be expressed in words.

Both sprang up and began rushing excitedly about. Finally, it came into Barney's head to ring the alarm gong.

As this broke the stillness of the night the sleepers below were aroused, and came tumbling excitedly up on deck.

"What's the matter?" cried Frank, in a stentorian voice.

"Shure, sor, the plain is all afire!" cried Barney.

But Frank saw this quickly enough.

His face paled.

"My God!" he exclaimed, "that is true. We must run before it! If those flames overtake us we are lost!"

He sprang into the tower.

He seized the lever which set the electric machinery in motion and pulled it open.

The Thunderer leaped ahead and was quickly racing over the plain in advance of the fire.

The searchlight showed far ahead, and in this manner obstructions were avoided.

Had it not been for this the Thunderer would have dashed itself to pieces upon some large obstacle in the path.

On over the plain they went.

The wind being in the right direction drove the flames across the plain in a mighty volume.

It was a close and exciting race.

The dry grass was just like tinder, and the flames went on at race horse speed.

On went the Thunderer.

Those in the cage watched the flames with awful fascination.

They seemed to reach the zenith in a lurid wave, and the plain was like day. In the path of the flames came various droves of wild animals.

It being dark ahead, Frank could not tell what would be the end of the mad race.

There might have been a chance to dodge the flames to the right or left, but he could not see it, and dared not accept it.

On and on they went at furious speed. But suddenly Frank experienced a peculiar motion from the wheels, which gave him a gratifying realization.

They had struck a part of the plain which was clear of the grass, having been recently burned over.

Upon this they would be safe enough, for the fire could only go so far as the dried grass offered itself as fuel.

Running for a half mile upon this burnt part of the plain, the Thunderer was brought to a stop.

The flames had reached the limit of the combustible grass and were dying out.

A few moments later only the smouldering spark-strewn plain was to be seen. The fire was out.

The Thunderer had escaped.

But an excited conference was held by the voyagers.

Who had attempted to destroy the Thunderer in this manner? This was the question, but it was not a difficult one to answer.

Of course, some of the gang of Modak Khan had done it.

They had fancied that the voyagers would be asleep, and being overtaken by the flames, would be burned up alive before they could make a move to escape.

But their game had failed.

It was very fortunate for all that it had. If the flames had got a least bit of a start the Thunderer would have been destroyed.

Words cannot express the anger and excitement of Nick Ward.

"We ought to go back and teach that Modak Khan a red hot lesson," he declared. "He is not even civil."

But the opportunity to do this was nearer at hand than Nick imagined.

Suddenly a sharp cry came from Barney in the signal-tower.

"Och hone, Misther Frank, shure an' it's comin' for us they are in thousands. Run fer yer loife to the electhric gun!"

At that moment the thunder of myriad hoofs upon the level plain was heard.

Through the gloom, shadowy like, a huge body seemed descending upon the Thunderer.

In an instant all was excitement. Every man sprang for his weapon, for lively times were at hand.

CHAPTER VIII.

AN UNSUCCESSFUL ATTACK.

Frank Reade, Jr., sprang to the searchlight and sent its rays out over the plain.

It flashed its blinding light in the faces of a mighty body of mounted Tartars, who were sweeping down upon the Thunderer.

Frank saw this clearly.

The Tartars were close on.

The flash of their lance blades, the rattle of their equipments could be plainly heard.

Then from their throats there went up a mighty, hoarse roar.

It rolled like thunder over the plain.

They came on in a solid body, and it was plain enough that they meant to overtake the Thunderer and crush it.

All this was made evident to Frank Reade, Jr., in a flash of time.

But the young inventor was not in the least daunted.

It was not the first time he had faced a little danger, by a long ways

He was cool and collected, and made quick and decisive action.

There was hardly time to use the electric gun, but he shouted to Barney in the pilot-tower:

"Turn lever No. 10, Barney. Give full current."

Then the young inventor sprang out into the cage.

Barney pulled the lever as directed.

The Thunderer leaped forward with terrific impetus, straight at the approaching body of horsemen.

It would have seemed that the cavalcade should have crushed the machine by mere weight alone.

But Frank had devised the Thunderer with a view to just such an exigency.

At either end there was a large and keen pointed ram.

This was capable of resisting great pressure and cutting its way through a solid body like this.

Therefore, as the body of Tartars came on, the Thunderer's ram turned them right and left.

None of the bold riders desired to impale themselves on the deadly ram.

But like a whirlwind the gang swarmed about the Thunderer.

There was fully a thousand of them, and they tried in vain to cut their way through the cage.

Blows with lances, clubs and heavy axes were dealt the steel netting as they passed.

Many a keen lance blade was shivered, and many an axe blade turned as it encountered the hard steel.

The netting was utterly impervious to such an attack.

The fight was terrific.

The Tartars were determined to smash the Thunderer to pieces this time. They dashed their horses against it and hammered and pounded most furiously.

But all to no avail.

The voyagers, with their Winchesters, kept up a fusillade, and Frank once was able to sight the electric gun.

A dynamite projectile piled the Tartars up in a heap, and then Frank essayed new tactics.

He let the Thunderer forge ahead at lightning speed.

Through the ranks of the foe it tore its way with irresistible force.

They might as well have tried to hold a cyclone.

Clear of the gang, Frank let the Thunderer run ahead for three hundred yards.

Then he sent a projectile back from the pneumatic gun.

It created havoc in the ranks of the Tartars, and they fled into the darkness, cowed and whipped.

The battle was won.

Modak Khan had made his last effort to vanquish the invaders of his land.

Nothing more was seen of the foe that night.

The next morning the Thunderer was once more under way, on its way to the region where Mardo Turgi held sway.

All that day and the next the Thunderer traveled over the steppes.

Then the wonderful plains, with their boundless sameness of green, began to give way, and a broken country came to view, with mountains in the distance.

Suddenly Barney, who was in the pilot-tower, shouted to Frank.

"Shure, Misther Frank, wud yez come up here at wanst?"

"What is it, Barney?"

"Shure, sor, maybe yez can tell betther than I."

"All right!" said Frank, as he began to climb the stairs om the cabin.

In a few moments he was in the pilot-house.

"Shure, sor, would yez take a peep to the westward there, or, an' phwat wud yez call that? I am thinkin' that it is body of min, sor!"

Frank picked up a glass which lay at hand, and com-
menced.

He saw plainly the object mentioned by Barney.

It was a long moving line of black objects upon the brow
of a distant hill.

The glass brought them nearer to view, and Frank saw
that they were mounted men.

That they were Tartars there was little doubt.

The young inventor watched them with interest for a
while.

Then he shut the glass with a snap.

"Well, sor," said Barney, "phwat wud yez think av
him?"

"They are Kirghiz," said Frank.

"Shure, sor, an' I belave yez. Phat will yez do about
t?"

"We will give them chase."

"Chase thim, is it, sor?"

"Yes."

This suited the Celt well, and he sent the Thunderer
earing along in that direction.

But the Tartars were not disposed to flee.

In fact, their curiosity seemed as great as that of the
voyagers, for it was seen with some surprise that they were
also coming toward the Thunderer.

All were on deck now, and eagerly watching the distant
Kirghiz.

It was certain that they were of Mardo Turgi's band, and
had never seen or heard of the Thunderer before.

It could be safely reckoned, therefore, as a surprise party
to them.

It was certain that they would be hostile and aggressive.

Preparations were made on board the Thunderer for a
possible conflict.

Every moment now the Kirghiz could be seen to be draw-
ing nearer.

Their persons were now quite readily distinguishable,
and it was seen that they were of a higher class than Modak
Khan's band.

They were better dressed and much better equipped.

On they came at a full, swinging gallop, giving their
ponies free rein.

There were evidently one hundred or more in the party.
Three hundred yards from the Thunderer they drew rein.

Frank also brought the Thunderer to a stop.

It was evidently the desire of the Kirghiz to enter into
a parley.

Frank saw this and made a show of a white flag at the
front of the Thunderer.

The Kirghiz answered this, and then two of their number
came riding forward.

Rough savage-looking fellows they were, and they drew
rein a dozen yards from the Thunderer and sat upon their
ponies regarding it curiously.

Frank stepped outside of the cage and tried to address
them in French.

But they did not understand, and the young inventor
cried:

"Come, Nick, you'll have to talk Turk with these fel-
lows."

"Perhaps they won't know that," replied Nick.

"Try it, anyway."

"Of course."

Nick addressed them in the Turkish language. One of
them understood it, and made answer:

Nick catechised the fellow sharply and shrewdly.

Then he turned to Frank:

"They are rogues and cut-throats. They belong to
Mardo Turgi's band, and want us to give them backsheesh.
I've a mind to give them a taste of cold lead."

"No doubt they deserve it," said Frank. "But have you
asked them about Madge?"

"Yes."

"What have they to say?"

"Mardo Turgi holds her in his mountain palace for a
ransom. I asked them where the palace was, and they said
to go straight ahead until we came to three mountains just
alike. Then we would see it upon the side of one of them."

"Good enough! Let us go ahead at once."

"Wait until I catechise them further."

This Nick proceeded to do.

But he could learn no more.

The Kirghiz now, however, began to realize that they
were not likely to get bachsheesh, and made savage cries.

They brandished their arms, and by words and signs
made foolish threats.

Nick told them pointedly that if they did not clear out
they would be shot down like dogs.

This infuriated the wretches, and they made the air
hideous for a time with their cries.

But finally they found that this would not work, and galloped back to their friends.

Then the entire band set up a howl and for a time were very noisy and rude.

Then they began to assume an aggressive and hostile attitude.

They began to circle about the Thunderer, firing in the air at first. Then the bullets began to rattle against the cage.

"Shure an' shall we give the spalpeens a dose?" asked Barney, fingering the lock of his rifle.

"I think not," replied Frank. "It would be a useless shedding of blood."

Frank gave directions that the Thunderer should be put to its best speed and distance the foe.

This was done, the ponies of the Kirghiz being left behind easily.

Miles were covered at this rate, and soon the party were left far behind.

It was now a question as to whether the Kirghiz had told Nick the truth or not about the three mountains and the home of Mardo Turgi.

If they had, it was safe to say that the field of action would soon be reached.

The country was the wildest of any they had yet passed through.

There were deep forests, long plains, valleys and gulches, and at times shallow streams were crossed.

Then suddenly three mountains of about the same height and very similar in appearance rose to view.

These were undoubtedly the mountains the Kirghiz had told Nick about.

In this respect they had certainly uttered the truth.

The voyagers were now all interest and eagerness, and looked forward with great anticipation to see the mountain palace of Mardo Turgi.

Suddenly Frank pointed up to the mountain wall, and cried:

"There it is! See for yourselves!"

All looked in the direction indicated, and saw a massive, castle-like structure far up on the side of the mountain.

It was roughly constructed of logs and stone, but was quite an imposing fortress, and in an altogether inaccessible position.

CHAPTER IX.

POMP DOES SOME GOOD WORK.

Mardo Turgi, the Kirghiz leader, had certainly selected a most unassailable point for his prison fortress.

The rescuing party gazed up at the mighty height, and their hearts sank.

It did not seem an easy matter by any means to rescue Madge from that place.

How to get to it to make an attack upon it was a problem. But time would reveal whether this would be at all possible or not.

Darkness was fast coming on.

Thus far not one of the Kirghiz had been seen in the vicinity.

Whether they were aware of the presence of the Thunderer or not it was not easy to say.

But if so they had not demonstrated the fact by any show of an attack.

A good spot was selected for a camp, and the Thunderer there was laid up.

One thing seemed certain.

The stronghold, and very likely the place of residence of all of the band of Mardo Turgi was far up on the mountain side.

Frank had done a heap of thinking, and had made up his mind to a daring move.

The castle of the Tartar chief was certainly inaccessible to an attack by the Thunderer.

To be sure dynamite projectiles could be thrown up there and demolish it, but when it was remembered that Madge was confined within the walls, this seemed out of the question.

Frank's plan, therefore, was one of mighty risk, but deep strategy.

He called Nick and Jack aside, and said:

"Are you fellows willing to take a little bit of risk?"

"What do you mean?" asked Nick.

"I will tell you. Of course, you can see how useless it is to attack Mardo Turgi with the Thunderer?"

"Yes."

"Now, I have a plan. We must venture a climb up that mountain to-night in the dark. It will require strategy and skill and great care. We may get caught and our lives pay for it. But I can see no other or better way of effecting the rescue of Madge."

"You are right!" cried Nick. "We are with you. Eh, Jack?"

"Depend upon it!" replied the young Englishman.

"Then it is settled."

"But who will stay with the machine?" asked Nick.

"It will hardly be prudent to take Mr. Westervelt along. We will let him stay with Barney. The rest of us will go."

cluding Pomp?"

es."

od!" cried Nick. "When shall we start?"
st as soon as it is dark enough. The darker the

two young men were enthused with the scheme.
did not stop to think of danger. That was not one
ir attributes.

is settled, then!" cried Nick, "we will go. But——"
ell?"

ave you any decided plan of action, Frank? We
he mountain, and—what then?"

can hardly say. If possible we will find the location
fortress where Madge is confined. Then if we can,
l break in and rescue her!"

d grant that we may," said Jack Wall, fervently.

young Englishman's manner was to Frank an ink-
f something which he had not guessed before.

he first opportunity he whispered to Nick:

ll me, is not Wall in love with this young girl?"

s," replied Nick, bluntly. "He is completely gone
er."

nk muttered an exclamation of keen disappointment,
surprised Nick.

ay?" he asked, in surprise. "Is there anything
about that, Frank?"

ot a thing," said the young inventor, with a grimace.
I wish I had known it in the first place."

ay?"

would have left him on board."

was dumbfounded.

ay should you do that?" he asked, in sheer amaze-
"Jack is plucky."

s; but a lover is always sure to do rash things, do
e? He may get us all into trouble."

u are right," agreed Nick. "I never thought of

Thunderer was in a secure nook, where it would es-
ally the closest scrutiny from the vicinity. Darkness
utting down also helped to secrete it.

others were informed of the forlorn hope party
was going to essay the rescue of Madge.

Westervelt did not object to be left out of the party.
is all right!" he said, pleasantly. "I am too old
ff. I would be of little service. It is for you agile
to go. God grant you may win success."

hope to," said Frank Reade, Jr. "We will risk
for it."

party was soon equipped.

It was agreed that they should dress as lightly as possi-
ble, and carry only necessary weapons.

These consisted of a Winchester, a revolver and a knife.

A system of signals was arranged, and the equipment
was complete.

All that was necessary now was to await until it was
sufficiently dark, and then make the start.

Lights were seen in the fortress far above. At length
Frank decided that the proper time had come.

The party left the Thunderer and crept into the deep
gloom.

They approached the mountain slope until they entered
the edge of the forest. Here a consultation was held.

It was decided that all should separate and make their
way, each independent of the other, up to the walls of the
castle.

A system of signals was to be used so that each could be
informed of the movements of the other.

Then the start was made.

As Pomp was the one destined to have the most thrilling
adventures, we will follow him in his course.

The darky crept through the dense undergrowth up the
slope.

His companions had long since passed from sight and
hearing.

To be sure he could have signaled them at any moment,
but this he did not choose to do.

"I jes' reckon dat when Marse Frank wants to see dis
chile he call fo' him," muttered the darky. "I'm not one
bit afraid ob dat."

So Pomp kept on making his way up the mountain side.

The darky was shrewd and apt in matters of this kind.

He had trailed Indians with Frank Reade, Jr., upon the
plains, and knew the art of woodcraft well.

He knew that the Tartars were superior in fighting abili-
ties and general intelligence to the North American Indian.

But he did not believe that they could excel the American
aborigine in point of strategy or cunning device.

The darky's plans were quickly laid and cleverly out-
lined.

"I'll jes' do a bit ob scoutin' around de enemy's camp,"
he muttered. "An' den if I gits a chainece I finds out whar
dat young gal am kep'."

With this set purpose in view Pomp went on his way.

It was a long and toilsome climb.

There were thorny shrubs which tore his garments and
lacerated his flesh. Rough ledges and jagged rocks to
climb over.

But yet he kept on until after what seemed an age he saw a light through the dense foliage above.

Pomp came to a halt.

"Hum!" he muttered. "I done fink dat mus' be a light from de Tartar's camp. Now, dis chile hab got to proceed very sophilious—very."

With which conclusion Pomp continued his upward climb, exercising the most rigid care.

The result was that he soon reached a point where the forest ceased and a wide plateau extended before him.

In the center of this there burned a large watch fire.

Back of it Pomp saw the walls of the Tartar fort.

The watch fire was evidently intended for a precaution against the attack of an enemy.

But what was a very curious thing thus far Pomp had not encountered a guard, or even seen a single Tartar.

But now, at intervals across the plateau, he saw sentries posted. They were tall fellows, with long lances and shields.

The darky hovered in the edge of the forest for some while and watched them.

"Humph!" he muttered. "I done fink dis chile hab got quite a serious job fo' to slip by dem chaps. But jes' de same, I'd like fo' to see what am inside ob dat fort."

Pomp had plenty of daring, and an all powerful curiosity.

It was the latter, perhaps as much as anything that led him to take the course which he did.

Pomp selected a spot which was between the picket posts, and which was totally dark.

Then he emerged from the shadows of the forest and began to crawl on his belly out upon the level plateau.

Pomp wormed his way along like a veritable snake.

And so great was the gloom that he was wholly unseen by the Tartar guards against the blackness of the ground.

Had he been upright, or even in a crouching position, he would certainly have been seen.

But the wily darky had adopted the one successful method for passing the Tartar outpost.

Like a veritable snake Pomp made his way slowly across the plateau.

He passed just beyond the circle of light from the big fire, and soon had got well beyond the picket line.

Pomp was elated at his signal success.

Certainly his plans had worked most admirably. It had been no slight undertaking to outwit those vigilant Tartars.

Beyond the picket line the coast seemed clear.

There was a sloping line of earthworks above which rose the log and stone walls of the fortress.

There were lights inside the fort, and Pomp could hear the sounds of revelry. The Tartars were evidently having a high old time.

The darky chuckled to himself, and lying upon his back at the foot of the earthworks surveyed the distance through an open porthole above, and the chances of climbing up.

There were clinging vines, similar to the strong teretia, over the face of the structure.

Pomp had no doubt that with the aid of these he could climb up to the porthole.

It was large enough to easily admit his body.

If he could reach it, certainly it would be no difficult thing to enter the fort.

"P'raps dis chile kin fin' de young missy, an' sab' aftah all," muttered Pomp, jubilantly. "What wud I care Frank an' de oders say den? I done fink dey gib dis credit for knowing a fink or two!"

Thus reassuring himself Pomp proceeded to attempt the daring feat.

Much of risk and danger was involved in it.

CHAPTER X.

A DARING RESCUE.

Certainly Pomp had distinguished himself mightily in the work he had done thus far.

It looked as if he would succeed in carrying out his plan.

He crept cautiously up over the earthworks, and reached the masonry of the fort.

This was of the crudest kind.

Huge bowlders had simply been piled up in a mass, and there were huge niches and interstices by which good holds could be had.

Also the strong vines, fully as firm as the ratlines of a ship, would have been, afforded means of support.

Pomp was a good climber.

Up went the darky like an agile monkey.

The light from the fires below in certain spots illuminated the wall of the fort.

But Pomp was in the shadows, which were made more dense by reason of contrast with the firelight.

It was hardly likely that he could be seen by the guards below.

However, he willingly took the risk and did not shrink from it.

Up he went, and now came to that part of the fort which was composed of logs.

his foothold was not so secure.

logs were slippery and the vines more yielding, and times he slipped back and nearly fell the whole dis-

he slowly persevered, and victory rewarded him.

hands gripped the sill of the window and he drew up.

moment his head was above the sill, and he beheld the scene.

aw a mighty courtyard, with a hard, level floor, covered fully a couple of acres.

was dotted with camp fires, and hundreds of armed men were there congregated in various attitudes of ease. They were a savage and barbaric looking crew.

Pomp saw at a glance that this was but a part of a bastion.

The main citadel or house part of the fort was more to the right and upon the corner of the wall.

As the light from these camp fires which shone through the porthole.

ten yards from the open port there walked an armed

enter by this window then was out of the question.

could be simply walking into the wide open arms of

Pomp saw this at a glance, and at once slid back from the window.

It was to be done?

He regretted now that he had attempted to scale the wall at that point.

The darky was not long in hitting upon a plan.

He estimated the height of the roof above, and then began to climb for it.

It was a long and hard climb.

He was now fully sixty feet from the ground below, and it would mean death.

Pomp reached the roof in safety. Lying on his back now he could look down into the Tartar camp.

It was certainly a large one, there being many hundreds of barbarians there congregated.

They were engaged in many curious and interesting occupations.

He regarded them with interest.

Some were playing at games of chance, others were wrestling, some at sword play and other athletic games.

It was a vast and interesting panorama. Pomp had never seen the like before in his life.

Why! Dey seem to be havin' a mighty good time ob

it," muttered the darky. "Seems if it was quite a snap for 'em to be a robber in dese yer parts."

But the darky did not waste a great deal of time in watching the scene.

He realized that there was lively work ahead for him, and he was not slow to get down to it.

He crawled along the sloping roof cautiously until he reached that part which he knew must be over the main citadel or house of the fort.

Here he was fortunate enough to find an aperture or trapdoor, and a ladder leading down into darkness.

This was near a tall flagstaff, from which floated the ensign of Mardo Turgi.

Pomp did not hesitate to slide down the ladder into the darkness below.

In a few moments his feet touched the floor.

He listened intently.

There was no sign of life about him, and he became satisfied that he was all alone in this part of the fort.

The darky hesitated a moment, and then scratched a match.

By its momentary glow he saw that he was in a square tower chamber, from which stairs led down to rooms below.

Pomp had gone too far now to turn back. He proceeded to creep down these stairs, and came to a long corridor dimly lighted.

Oil lamps were placed at intervals.

Upon either side of the corridor were doors of strong wicker work and steel.

These doubtless opened into chambers beyond. If any of these were occupied the darky had no means of knowing, for they were all dark but one.

This one a light shone from through a small grating in the door.

Pomp paused at the end of the corridor, and did some tall thinking.

It looked to him very much as if these were prison cells.

Instinctively he thought of Madge.

"P'raps de young missy am in one ob dese," he muttered under his breath. "Dis chile am gwine fo' to see!"

But just as Pomp was about to make a move forward a sound brought him to an instant halt.

Something like a deep snore had come to his hearing from the other end of the passage.

The darky's nerves were tense.

"Golly!" he muttered, "what am dat? I s'pees dar's somebody else in dis place."

He had thought of retreating to the darkness of the tower.

But at that moment he caught sight of an object at the far end of the passage.

It was the form of a man.

It was a powerfully-framed Tartar, who sat with his head between his knees. Pomp saw at once that he was the prison guard.

But he was at present powerless.

Sleep held him enchained.

Pomp's delight can be imagined.

The darky realized at once that he had penetrated to the part of the robber's stronghold where his prisoners were kept.

This was the greatest possible bit of luck, and the darky knew it.

"Golly!" he muttered, "I reckon dis chile may fin' de young missy aftah all. What would Marse Frank say if I should?"

Pomp's delight was intense.

He waited a reasonable length of time to make sure that the Tartar guard was fast asleep.

Then he crept forward and looked through the grated door of the first cell.

All was dark and he could see nothing.

Whether anybody was in there or not the darky could not tell.

Next he went to the door of the cell through which the light came.

Gazing through the grating Pomp beheld a thrilling sight.

Seated at a grated window looking off over the valley, Pomp saw a young girl, as petite and beautiful as a dream.

It was Madge Westervelt.

The darky was so excited that for a moment he forgot himself and said in a hushed voice:

"Missy, wake up. I'se done come fo' to sabe yo'; I'se Pomp!"

The effect of this upon Madge Westervelt can well be imagined.

In an instant she sprang up with a low cry of amazement.

"What?" she gasped. "Did I hear aright? Has some one come to save me?"

"Yes, missy!" replied Pomp, eagerly. "Jes' yo' cheer right up, now!"

"Great Heavens! Who are you?"

"I'se Pomp!"

Then the girl captive saw the black face pressed against the bars and her heart sank.

"You are mocking me," she said.

"No; fo' de good Lor', missy!" protested Pomp. "I come fo' to sabe yo'. I'se from yo' fader an' from Mr. Ward and Jack Wall!"

Madge nearly fainted with joy.

"You are not deceiving me?" she whispered.

"No, missy!"

"But how did you get here?"

"I'se done climbed up on de vines, an' come along de roof."

"But how did you get across the plateau. There are armed guards there?"

"Dat am so, missy. But I jes' skipped by dems dark."

"Heaven be praised! But how can we escape here?"

"Jes' yo' wait a lily bit, missy. Dis chile fin' a How yo' git dis do' open?"

"The guard has a key. But is he not here?"

"He am fas' asleep ober yender?"

"Mercy! Fortune has favored you!" cried Madge. "He is a giant, and you could hardly hope to worst him. He should wake up. There is no way to open this door with the key, and he has it."

"Am dat so?"

"Yes."

Pomp scratched his head a moment.

He had begun to consider the possible safety of venturing to steal the key from the sleeping guard's girdle, when the giant began to move and mutter in his sleep.

"Heavens!" exclaimed Madge. "He is waking up. This seemed true."

For a moment Pomp was in a fearful dilemma. What was to be done?

There seemed but one thing.

It was a desperate move, but there seemed no other.

The darky's mind was made up.

He picked up a heavy billet of wood which lay in the corridor.

Pomp had a repugnance to taking the Tartar's life. It was a question of saving his own.

For there was no doubt but that the wretch would kill him upon sight. Therefore Pomp took this desperate measure.

Pushing forward he dealt the brute a powerful blow on the head.

The giant started up with a gurgling cry. But a second rain blow after blow upon his thick skull.

Nothing could withstand such an onslaught as this.

The jailer reeled back and fell unconscious to the

up tore the fellow's girdle from him, and bound him and foot. Then he thrust the jailer's scarf into his as a gag.

ing up the bunch of keys Pomp sprang to the door dge's cell.

equired some time to select the right key.

he finally succeeded.

lock swung back, and for the first time in many Madge Westervelt saw freedom before her.

up realized well the necessity of prompt action.

any moment a relief guard might come, and should cape be discovered the result would be terrible.

he darky took Madge's hand in his, and cried:

me, missy, I'se gwine fo' to see yo' safely out of here, y, no mattah whatebber becomes ob me!"

CHAPTER XI.

POMP FACES DEATH.

p was in earnest.

as thoroughly in keeping with his generous nature. ould willingly have given his life to save the young

ing the corridor he led her and up into the tower.

ge was a plucky girl, and not afraid to climb. She o trouble therefore in ascending the ladder to the

p followed, and now the problem confronted the as to how he was to get his charge down from that erch.

might have taken the risk to climb down upon the himself.

of course Madge could not do this.

the darky was not long in doubt.

dea came to him quickly.

went to the flagstaff and boldly hauled down the flag.

his knife Pomp cut the halliards, and pulled them e block.

ad now over one hundred feet of good strong rope. end of this he lashed about the flagstaff, and then

sy, am yo' a bit afraid fo' to hab me tie dis rope o' waist an' jes' lower yo' down to de groun'?"

ge promptly replied:

"

am a brave girl," said Pomp, joyfully. "Dat am uff."

It was about sixty feet to the ground below, as the darky knew.

The rope was amply long enough to reach that distance.

Pomp carefully tied the rope under Madge's arms, and said:

"Now, I'se gwine fo' to lower yo' down to de groun,' an' when yo' gits dar, jes' don' wait fo' me, but jes' slip into de trees and cut down de mounting side as fast as eber yo' kin. When yo' gits to de plain below dis chile come down an' fin' yo'. See?"

"Yes," replied Madge, "I will follow your instructions."

Then she bravely advanced to the edge of the roof.

Pomp let her carefully over the edge, and continued to lower on the rope until it was nearly out.

Madge reached the ground in safety.

Thus far the game was a glaring success. Pomp was delighted.

He felt the rope slack, and quickly drew it up a few feet, and secured it more strongly to the frame of the flag-staff.

He was heavier than Madge, and this was why he took this precaution.

*Then he swung himself over the roof and went down the rope like a monkey.

Down he went rapidly.

He could see the lights of the pickets below. Suddenly a curious thing happened.

The big watch fire seemed to blaze up quickly, and threw a mighty radiance upon the wall about him.

This was a startling and unlooked for development.

It struck a chill into Pomp's breast.

He heard a loud shout from the plateau below, and then a bullet went singing past him.

He knew that he had been seen.

Pomp waited for nothing now.

He knew that all depended upon his reaching the ground in the quickest possible time.

Down he went on a long slide.

The rope burned his clothing and his flesh. But he cared not for that.

The moment his feet struck the ground Pomp started for the trees.

But before he could reach their cover a dozen burly forms were about him.

He was hurled to the ground in the midst of an excited, jabbering crowd of Tartars.

He was a prisoner, and knew better than to make resistance.

"Golly sakes!" thought the affrighted darky, "dis chile

am in it fo' suah. Well, I jes' hopes de missy got away, anyway!"

Pomp momentarily expected his captors to kill him.

But they did not.

He was picked up bodily and carried up the slope, and a few moments later into the yard of the fort.

Here the most tremendous excitement prevailed.

The entire Tartar crew flew to arms, and Pomp was in the midst of the excited horde.

A tall, powerfully-framed man, dressed in the extreme of barbaric fashion, now appeared upon the scene.

A sort of inquisition was hastily held. The escape of the girl captive had been discovered, and Pomp believed that his last hour had come.

The plucky, but unfortunate, darky was at once condemned to death by the angry Tartar leader.

He was led out into the center of the yard, and two powerful Tartars were bidden to stand over him with drawn swords.

It was evident that Pomp's head was about to come off.

The darky was terrified beyond measure.

His eyes bulged from their sockets and his wool stood upon end. He trembled like an aspen leaf.

The darky's neck was bared and the powerful Tartars brandished their swords aloft.

The Tartar chief, Mardo Turgi, stood with the order upon his lips, when a thrilling thing occurred.

But what of the other members of the Thunderer's party?

Frank, Reade, Jr., had pushed up the mountain side some hundred yards further to the right.

Jack Wall and Nick Ward were just beyond him.

The young inventor's plan was mainly to reconnoiter the stronghold.

The daring idea had not occurred to him as it had to Pomp to attempt to effect the rescue of Madge.

He had considered carefully the possibility of getting the Thunderer up to the gates of the stronghold, so that he might batter them down.

If it had not been for the obstruction offered by the trees and rocks this might have been possible anywhere.

But Frank saw at a glance that the Thunderer could not progress through these.

But he adhered to a belief that somewhere on the west side of the mountain he would be able to find a roadway or path.

Certainly Mardo Turgi's men were in the habit of riding over the mountain on horseback.

There must exist some kind of a bridle path.

Doubtless this would be plenty wide enough to allow the safe passage of the Thunderer up the hill.

"Once I can get the electric gun trained upon the fort," muttered Frank, "I will bring Mardo Turgi to terms."

There was no doubt of this.

So Frank kept on boldly.

Thus far he had seen no sign of a living Tartar.

In this respect his experience was similar to Pomp's.

But suddenly he came to a level shelf, from which a view of the fortifications could be had.

Light were gleaming through the portholes in the walls of the fort, and Frank saw armed Tartars upon the walls.

He reflected at once that it would be impossible to attempt to creep into the place from that side.

He abandoned any such idea.

Neither had he been able, thus far, to see any possibility of getting the Thunderer up over the height.

This was a most discouraging realization.

What was to be done?

Frank was wholly at sea.

It certainly would seem like folly for the mere handful of men that they were to attempt an assault without the aid of the Thunderer.

The cause looked like a hopeless one.

Yet Frank would not give up.

"There is a way," he muttered, "and I will find it."

He reconnoitered the Tartar stronghold for a time.

Then he decided upon another move.

He withdrew to what he considered a safe distance from the place.

Then he began to spring the signal whistle for his companions.

It was some little time before an answer came.

Then from a point to the right he got an answer. A moment later a dark form stood near him.

"Is that you, Nick?" he asked, in a hoarse whisper.

"No; it is Jack," was the reply. "Are you Mr. Reade?"

"Yes," replied Frank, joining the young Englishman.

"Where is Nick?"

"I signaled him a moment ago down there to the right."

"All right; let us find him."

But at that moment another form appeared in the darkness.

It was Nick Ward.

Salutations were exchanged, and then Pomp was signified for.

But in vain.

He did not answer.

was finally necessary to abandon signaling the darky. ere he was it was impossible even to guess.

"But Pomp will take care of himself," said Frank, constantly. "I don't think we need to worry about him!" "Well," said Nick, "how did you succeed, Frank?" "Poorly," replied the young inventor. "I could not find possible way for the Thunderer to get up here." "Indeed!"

"I am sorry to say so."

"Well," said Nick, slowly, "I do not know the climbing ways of your machine, Mr. Reade, but I have found quite passable road up here."

An excited cry escaped Frank's lips.

"You don't mean it?"

"Yes; I do."

"Then we are all right."

"Good!"

"Let us see that road at once."

"Come with me."

Nick led the way for some distance along the mountain

Suddenly the party came out upon a ledge, which overhung a ravine. In the course of this was laid the road of ascent.

It was more properly a bridle path, being not over ten feet wide.

Nick Frank hastily measured it, and said with joy: "Hurrah! The Thunderer will come up here with us."

"I note one singular fact," said Nick.

"What?"

"That no guard is posted in this ravine. The Mardochi is extremely careless."

"You are right; but that is to our advantage. Come, boys, let us work quick and strike quick."

"We are ready."

Nick Frank paused.

"It is hardly right to go without learning Pomp's fate,"

he said. "Harm may have come to him."

"You are right," said Nick, "let us make another search for him."

As was done.

But they might as well have spared themselves the trouble. Not a sign of Pomp could be found anywhere.

What had become of the darky was a mystery. Frank was alarmed.

"Really!" he said, earnestly. "I fear that some harm may have come to him!"

"But need we worry greatly?" asked Nick. "He is a clever fellow."

CHAPTER XII.

EXCITING WORK.

"Pomp is an excellent scout," agreed Frank. "I would not fear for him in an Indian country!"

"Then we need not fear for him here," said Nick.

"But what can he be doing," asked Jack Wall, apprehensively.

"Oh, he is up to some clever game or other. He will turn up like enough with some valuable information for us."

"Well, we will have to work independent of Pomp," said Frank, decisively. "We are losing valuable time!"

"So say I!" said Nick.

"Let us be off, then!"

"All right!"

This settled the matter, and the party vanished down the mountain side.

They followed the ravine down closely to the plain.

They found that it was quite feasible to run the Thunderer up the ravine, and at once returned to the machine.

Barney and Mr. Westervelt were on guard and welcomed them warmly.

"Shure, Misther Frank, it's worried I am about the naggur!" said Barney, apprehensively. "Yez ought to have lift him behind an' taken a man av experience loike me-silf!"

Frank laughed at this.

"That is one word for Pomp and two for yourself," he said.

"Shure, sor, I'm afther thinkin' the poor sowl is dead!"

"We will hope not," said Frank. "Now, Barney, put the rubber climbing tires on the wheels at once!"

"All roight, sor."

Barney proceeded to obey orders.

The rubber tires were so adjusted that they could be easily and quickly put on the wheels.

They were a peculiar invention of Frank Reade, Jr.'s, and of great service.

The rubber surface was adapted for climbing up steep ascents and also for muffling the wheels.

This done, all was announced in readiness for the start.

Frank went into the tower and set the lever.

The Thunderer glided noiselessly into the ravine, and began to make its upward way to the plateau above.

In less than twenty minutes the machine was upon the plateau.

Frank sent it forward noiselessly and shadow-like to a point upon an eminence from whence they could look down into the stronghold.

The whole interior of the fortress yard was visible. And a thrilling scene was witnessed.

It was just at the moment when Pomp was led forth to be executed by the vengeful Mardo Turgi.

The brutal Tartar executioners had just advanced with their gleaming swords and stood over the condemned darky. A great cry went up from all on board the Thunderer.

"My God, what is that?"

"Some one is going to be slaughtered!"

"Heavens, it is Pomp!"

"Save him!"

"He must not die!"

Barney was the first one to act.

The Celt saw the awful, deadly peril of his confrere the first of all. His blood was at boiling pitch.

"Whurroo!" he yelled, "they shall niver kill the loikes av him!"

Quick as a flash he raised his rifle and took aim.

Frank sent the blinding rays of the searchlight down and transfigured the whole scene.

Crack!

Mardo Turgi, with the order for Pomp's execution upon his lips, threw up his arms and fell. It was just in the nick of time.

The order to cut Pomp's head off was never uttered.

Crack! Crack!

The two executioners dropped.

Pomp in an instant saw the searchlight's glare, and knew what it meant. He acted quickly.

With wonderful presence of mind he seized the sword from the hand of one of the dead executioners.

He began to lay about him furiously.

At that moment Frank Reade, Jr., pulled the valve of the electric gun.

A projectile struck the fort wall.

There was a roaring explosion, and the air was full of flying debris.

When it cleared away it was seen that a huge hole had been blown in the wall of the fort.

It was a breech fully ten feet wide. Down through it went the Thunderer full tilt and head on.

Down into the midst of the Tartar crew went the Thunderer.

There was a momentary effort at resistance.

But a projectile from the electric gun blew hundreds of

them into eternity quicker than one could say Jack inson.

This settled the affair.

Overwhelmed with awful terror the Tartars broke fled for their lives.

Over the parapet and into the wild forest they rushed. The victory was won.

Mardo Turgi was dead and his invincible robber hold was captured. All had been accomplished in a few minutes.

It was a clear demonstration of the triumph of over brute force.

Cheer upon cheer went up from the victors.

Pomp had gained the deck of the Thunderer unhurt and Barney were embracing each other.

It was a joyful moment.

But when the first excitement had died away intentions began.

"How did you get into this den?" asked Frank of

"Golly, Marse Frank," replied the darky, "I jes' crawled in, sah!"

"Crawled in?"

"Yes, sah!"

"How did you do that?"

Pomp went on to detail his story.

All listened with thrilling interest. A great cry went up when he declared that he had set Madge at liberty.

"Brave fellow!" cried Frank Reade, Jr., "you have earned yourself with glory, Pomp."

The others joined in the praise.

"You are a hero!"

"Good for you!"

"It was a wonderful feat!"

"Pluck will win!"

But a startled thought had come to Nick Ward

"My soul!" he cried. "Where is Madge now? Can you tell me if she is safe?"

"'Clar to goodness I couldn't tell yo', chile!" cried Pomp.

"Heavens!" cried Jack Wall. "We must search for her at once. If she is in those woods then her position is dangerous, for those fleeing Tartars have all gone in that direction."

The thought gave all a chill of horror.

In an instant Jack and Nick and Barney and Pomp. Mr. Westervelt picked up their rifles.

Mr. Westervelt was frantic.

But Frank Reade, Jr., said:

"Wait a moment. Nothing is to be gained by has

"Listen to Mr. Reade," said Nick.

"All right."

"Let us have a concerted plan," said Frank. "We know at the young lady is no longer in this place."

"Yes."

"It is supposed that she escaped safely into the woods, and has made her way to the plain below."

"That is it!"

"Then there is no need of any of us remaining here?"

"Not a bit."

"Then I will undertake to take the Thunderer back down to the plain. You gentlemen can strike down through the woods. We may all meet and compare notes below."

This plan met the approval of all. It was, undoubtedly, the wisest and best plan that could be adopted.

So the party set out on foot, while Frank started with the Thunderer down through the ravine.

It required some little time for the young inventor to find his way down the ravine again.

But he finally succeeded in reaching the plain below in safety.

Frank let the Thunderer run slowly along the base of the hill, and listened for some sounds of the searching party. He fancied he could hear them far up on the side of the mountain.

But the young inventor was more on the lookout for the brute.

It seemed more reasonable to him that the young girl would come down the hill in safety, and was in the vicinity. If she should see the Thunderer she would no doubt save herself.

So Frank proceeded to send the machine along the base of the mountain slowly.

Suddenly, as he was approaching a clump of trees, he heard a thrilling scream.

It was in a feminine voice, and the young inventor saw a gleam of a white dress through the gloom.

He knew at once that the young girl had uttered that cry, and that she was in trouble.

There was the sound of a struggle, and then the clatter of hoofs.

Out upon the plain a horse and rider had dashed.

At first, in the blackness, Frank could not identify the rider.

But he quickly pulled the slide of the searchlight. This threw a pathway of radiance out over the plain for a mile.

In its focus he saw plainly a giant Tartar, mounted, and leaning across the pommel of his saddle the insensible form of Madge Westervelt.

At once Frank's whole soul was fired.

It seemed as if he could not act quick enough. Around came the Thunderer and down went the switch.

All the speed the machine possessed was called into play.

On over the plain sped the Thunderer in hot pursuit of the Tartar abductor.

Of course, the machine could easily outrun the horse.

Every moment the Thunderer gained upon the Tartar.

But now Frank beheld a thrilling and most dreadful sight.

The villain had anticipated the result of being overtaken. He proceeded at once to fully show up the brutal characteristics of his Tartar nature.

Maddened at the certainty of defeat his mind took a vengeful turn.

He turned his head and took a backward look at the Thunderer.

It was close upon him.

In a few moments more it would overtake him. The huge machine could easily outrun his fleet pony.

The brute's face wore a positively fiendish expression.

He lifted the light form of Madge from the pommel of his saddle as if it were but a feather.

Then Frank saw the brute draw a long knife.

In an instant the young inventor foresaw his fiendish purpose. It was to take the captive's life.

There was no time to lose.

Frank in an instant dropped the wheel and picked up his rifle. All occurred in the flash of a second.

The brute held the knife ready to plunge into the fair, white breast.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE END.

At that awful moment when Madge Westervelt's life did not seem worth a straw, Frank Reade, Jr.'s nerves were like iron.

He took quick, lighting-like aim, and fired.

There were a million chances against him.

The murderer's arm was in midair, yet not so very far out of range of the young girl's form, as Frank drew aim.

To miss might have been to send the bullet into her brain.

To miss would have given the brute the chance to plunge the knife into her heart.

In either case it was death.

There was but the one desperate chance, and Frank knew that it was all in the world that would save Madge.

He did not hesitate to take it.

Crack!

The rifle spoke sharply.

The effect was instant, and Frank Reade, Jr., reeled back overcome with the awful tension upon his nerves.

The bullet had struck the wrist of the murderer fair and square.

There was a shattering of the bone and the knife dropped.

There was a quick swerving of the Tartar pony and the rider went to the ground. The pony went on its mad career.

And clinging by her dress catching over the pommel, the sensible young girl still remained upon the animal's back.

It had been a desperate and close call.

But the pony had begun to fag, and seemed willing to come to a stop.

Frank lowered the Thunderer, and suddenly stopped it entirely.

He descended from the pilot-tower, and in an instant was upon the plain.

The pony had gone as far as its strength would permit. It was staggering like a drunken man not twenty yards away.

Frank easily caught the animal by the bridle, and quickly relieved it of its burden.

Back to the Thunderer he went with Madge's unconscious form in his arms.

Once on board, he quickly applied restoratives and brought her to.

Her surprise at being on board the Thunderer was now intense.

Frank overjoyed her with the news that she was to be very shortly restored to her father safe and well.

The run back to the mountain was quickly made.

There the rest of the party were found safe and well. They had experienced a slight skirmish with the Tartars, but beyond this all was well.

That reunion on board the Thunderer was a joyful one indeed.

Father and daughter, once more clasped in each other's arms, were happy.

"And we owe all to you, Mr. Reade," said the overjoyed father. "Rest assured you have our undying gratitude."

"Do not give me all the credit," said Frank, modestly.

"It belongs to you!" cried Nick Ward, earnestly.

And this but echoed the sentiments of the others.

The mission of the Thunderer in Kirghiz Tartary had been accomplished.

The Tartars' captive had been rescued, and now that was over, everybody looked forward to the return home.

Even Barney and Pomp, those indefatigable travelers, were eager to return.

"It will jes' seem good fo' to see ole Readestown mo'!" cried Pomp.

"Bejabers, yez are roight, naygur!" cried Barney. "I niver want any more av the Tartars nor their customs."

No time was wasted.

The Thunderer was quickly sent on its homeward way, and a few weeks later was once more at Irluk.

A few weeks later still the party were at Constantinople, and the Thunderer placed aboard a Mediterranean steamer.

Here Mr. Westervelt, Madge and Jack Wall took leave of the party.

They returned to England, where later Jack and Madge were married.

Nick Ward returned to the United States with Frank Reade, Jr., Barney and Pomp. In the course of the voyage Readestown was safely reached.

The trip had been a success, but the ocean voyage had given Frank a new idea for an invention, which we will be able to tell the reader about in a future story.

THE END.

The next number (7) of the "Frank Reade Magazine" will contain another thrilling story, entitled "FRANK READE, JR.'S AIR WONDER, 'KITE'; OR, A SIX WEEKS' FLIGHT OVER THE ANDES."

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